

A Comparative Study of Teahouse

A Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate School

Comparative Literature Division of English

The Chinese University of Hong Kong

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Philosophy

by

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October 1989

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude first of all to my thesis supervisor, Dr. Luk Yung Tong 陆润棠 for his invaluable encouragement and advice without which this thesis will not be possible. I am also grateful to the two thesis committee members, Dr. Chou Ying Hsiung 周英雄 and Dr. Tam Kwok Kan 谭国根. Thanks should also go to the external examiner of my thesis, Dr. Ching-hsi Perng 彭镜禧.

I would also like to take this opportunity to express my heart-felt gratitude to all the teachers in the Comparative Literature Research Unit who have over the past two years given me the most substantial instructions in the discipline of comparative literature. I am, besides, greatly indebted to the Lingnan Foundation and United Board for their generous financial assistance.

He Yongqing

贺永庆

October 1989

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I. Introduction

Lao She 老舍 (1899-1966) was a heavyweight figure on the contemporary Chinese literary scene for many reasons. He was a writer, critic and official all in one. His literary production ranges from fictions, plays, literary criticism to folk art literature such as cross-talks and dagu 大鼓 --versified stories sung to the accompaniment of a small drum and other instruments. He was born a Manchurian at a time when the Manchurian-founded Qing Dynasty was tottering on its last legs. During and after the 1937-1945 War of Resistance against Japan, Lao She got caught up in a feverish campaign for 'revolutionary literature', a literature which was neither truly Marxist nor characteristically national but class struggle-oriented and partisan. The nature of this literature was such that a champion writer like Lao She failed to escape its two-edged destructiveness; Lao She was eventually victimised by this literature at the height of the so-called 'Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution' in 1966.

Besides, Lao She was by no means unexposed to the Western literary tradition. He was a lecturer of Chinese literature and culture in the London School of Oriental and African Studies, a visiting scholar, to use a contemporary expression, to the United States shortly before 1949, and a tourist-writer in Singapore.<1> However, Lao She was by and large rooted in the Chinese literary tradition as will be evidenced at some lengths later on in a comparative study of his masterpiece, Teahouse 茶馆.

Because of his disgraced premature and summary death -- A theory has it that he committed suicide by throwing himself into

a Beijing lake,<2> and because of his characteristic modesty about his literary achievement coupled with a strict demand he had on his writing skills,<3> Lao She was not properly and objectively estimated until the end of the Cultural Revolution. The study of Lao She is, at best, still at a stage of data-gathering. The second chapter of this thesis will be dedicated to a critical review of the Lao She study in China and overseas.

This thesis will mainly study one of Lao She's successful plays, Teahouse. Methodologically, I shall seek to study respectively the original written text of the play, the stage representation of the play and the film adaptation of the play. By way of comparing the three different artistic forms of the play in light of the semiotic theory as well as the mass communication theory, I shall, hopefully, prove an ascending order of sensual appeal in the three artistic forms of Teahouse. In more general terms, the more audiovisual an artistic medium is, the more the medium appeals to the audience; the less abstract an artistic medium is, the less subjective the audience becomes in the artistic communication processes. Adversely, though the drama text may have the least sensual appeal when compared to the theatrical and filmic versions of the play, the act of reading a drama text is most capable of engaging the reader's imagination for "the reader has to without exception transform an abstract and purely linguistic signal into a visual and maybe even audiovisual picture of the decoded message of the play by associating the play and the dramatic personae's life with the reader's own personal life experiences, by means of the human instinct to imitate or to make believe, and by granting

some sort of gratification to the human sense of beauty. Also, in the process of a comparative study of the play in its several artistic forms, I shall probe the mechanisms behind the medium difference as well as the traditional Chinese and Western perceptions of drama, the theatre in particular.

The justification for adopting a comparative approach to study Teahouse and, by extension, Lao She and the Chinese and Western perceptions of drama lies in the fact that Teahouse has been performed in several foreign countries besides China and has been generally well received despite, in the case of foreign audiences, language barriers and an insufficient knowledge of modern Chinese history. While having something in common with the Western dramatic form -- the traditional Chinese dramatic form has something which distinguishes itself from the Western dramatic form. The classical Chinese dramatic form has a structure which resembles a variety show. It incorporates singing 唱, speaking 念, acting 做, and acrobatic fighting 打. Lao She also employed to effective and sensible avail the folk art form of 'shu lai bao' 数来宝, rhythmic storytelling to clapper accompaniment, to effect a transition of time and dramatic acts. This technique has an effect which resembles the alienating stylised dancing and singing found in the traditional Peking opera. One might even be reminded by the kind of alienating technique and effect in Brecht's plays. Chapter Three will contain a discussion and a comparison of the traditional Chinese and traditional Western dramatic structure and their mutual complementarity in the contemporary Chinese spoken play

话剧], particularly in the plays written by Lao She. Besides, Chapter Four will take up the issue of the similarities and dissimilarities as well as the complementarity of the generally Western stage performance and the traditional Chinese stage performance as is represented by the Peking opera.

Teahouse possesses some other unique features which are worth analysis and comparison. These include the innovative and economic use of father-son hereditary characterisation; the choice of a microcosmic locale, teahouse, as a reflector of the changing times which span 47 years and the changing social customs; the tone of comic-tragedy in the language people speak; and the local colour which saturates the entire play. All these and other stylistic features contribute to the uniqueness of the play both in itself and when accommodated to the more sensual artistic forms such as the stage and the film.

The third artistic form of Teahouse is the film, the youngest of the three media. Obviously, it is the film which achieves the highest degree of popularity for Teahouse. With its repeatability, especially in the advent of the video cassette equipment, its ability to highlight details with montage and other techniques, the incorporation of the music and the rich sound effect, a larger and more realistic background than what the stage can come up with, the use of the voiceover -- these and many other features definitely associated with the film make Teahouse highly accessible and enjoyable. However, one should not fail to notice the fact that the success of the film Teahouse is also indebted to the inspiring performance of the actors, actresses and the directing directors. It is also indebted to the

good script which Lao She was able to present. And, last but not least, the film is more a translation of the stage version of the play into the film version than a complete creation of its own. So, the discussion of the film version of Teahouse can not avoid bringing in the discussion of the written script and the stage representation of the same play. But I shall reduce the overlapping discussion to a minimum degree. However, a fifth chapter will attempt to compare and contrast the three artistic versions of the play Teahouse and a concluding chapter will give a succinct summary of the results reached by this comparative analysis of the three different artistic forms of Teahouse.

Notes:

1. In 1924 at the age of 26 Lao She went to England to teach Chinese language at the London School of Oriental and Asian Studies. He left Britain in the summer of 1929, spent three months travelling in some Continental European countries like France, Germany and Italy, and reached Singapore in October of the same year. In order to raise the international transportation fees, Lao She taught Chinese language in a Singapore secondary school. While in Singapore he started to write his novel Xiao Po's Birthday 小坡的生日. In March 1946 at the invitation of the State Department of the United States of America, Lao She and Cao Yu went on a lecture tour to the United States. Shortly after the founding of the People's Republic of China in October 1949, Lao She returned to Beijing.

2. At the height of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, Lao She was humiliated and attacked by the Red Guards. On August 24, 1966 Lao She drowned himself in the rear lake of the Pacific Lake 太平湖 just outside Deshengmen Gate 德胜门. Shortly after his body was discovered, Lao She was summarily cremated. A formal bone-ash-burial ceremony was held at Babaoshan Revolutionary Martyr's Cemetery 八宝山革命烈士公墓 on June 3, 1978. Also contained in the bone-ash casket were a fountain pen, a Chinese writing brush and a small pack of jasimine tea. Coincidentally, Lao She's father also died a tragic death during a fire in 1900 when the allied troops of eight Western countries stormed into Beijing and sacked the city. Wang Lifa, one of the central characters in Teahouse, also died an unnatural death by hanging himself.

3. In the prelude to Lao she yan jiu zhong lan 老舍研究纵览 (An Overview of the Lao She Studies), Mrs. Hu Jieqing 胡絮青, Lao She's widowed wife wrote to the effect that her husband was 'strange' in several aspects concerning literary creation. "He never saved his manuscripts after an article was written. He never clipped his published articles from newspapers or magazines. He kept a diary every day but he never wrote a word about the literary works he worked on during the day. Though his articles were published everywhere, he never collected them."

Wrote Mrs. Hu in the same prelude, "He was also very modest. All you heard from him regarding his literary works was that those works had this defect or that shortcoming, that he had never written any presentable stuff, and that he was merely good at telling stories."

II. Criticism of Lao She as a Dramatist

In terms of generic classification, Lao She's literary career could be divided into two main phases. From 1925 when he started to write his first novel, Lao Zhang's Philosophy, 老张的哲学 to the middle of the eight-year War of Resistance against Japan, Lao She was primarily committed to writing novels. From 1940, the year of the publication of his first play, The Dispersal of the Mist 雾, to 1964, he was mainly a playwright. Lao She was as much a prolific novelist as a prolific dramatist. He wrote fifteen full-length novels and numerous short stories. The number of plays he co-authored and wrote independently totals twenty-five, excluding three Peking operas.

There was something unnatural about the way Lao She made a clean and swift change in his literary preoccupation, though he succeeded in both fiction-writing and play-wrighting. Fundamentally, this had to do with his perception of the function of literature at a time when China was tossing and turning in continuous nationalistic, social and political upheavals. Also, his ethnic and family background made Lao She not only a great patriotic and innovative writer but also a sympathiser with the ordinary people. Even his death was a natural though also a horrible result of his special ethnic background and his characteristic uprightness, sense of dignity and honesty.

To begin with, Lao She came from a poor Manchurian family background. He was born in Beijing, the citadel of the Manchurian Qing Dynasty, on February 3, 1899. The first few years of his

life were most memorable to Lao She though he was not old enough to remember things yet then. However, from his mother he later learned about all those events that occurred to both his family and the 'Great Qing Empire'. Besides, the economic difficulties of his family was such that Lao She could not but feel an acute sense of loss on both the ethnic and familial ground.

The Qing Dynasty was established by the Manchurians who militarily conquered the whole Chinese territory but who were in turn assimilated by the culture of the conquered Han nationality. The relationship between the ruling Manchurian nationality and the ruled Han nationality in the Qing Dynasty (1616-1912) was one of ethnic confrontations. On the part of the Manchurian rulers, for the sake of preserving a minority-over-a-majority rule, the Qing court realised that it needed to keep a powerful and ready armed force whose loyalty could be counted on under all circumstances. So, the Qing court created a quasi-military eight-banner social structure among the Manchurians. In other words, all the Manchurians were divided into what was equivalent to eight large military units. And, soldiery was made to become the only profession open to the Manchurian men. The soldiers and their dependants were confined to living and socialising within one particular military unit. In return, the Qing court provided the soldiers and their families with all the food and other material needs. That created a pitiable dependance of the ordinary Manchurians on the Qing government. Meanwhile, it created in nationalities other than Manchurian a sense of inferiority and a resultant bitter ethnic hostility. However,

this military, social and economic arrangement of the life of the Manchurians turned the beneficiaries of such arrangement into a group of social and economic misfits after the downfall of the Qing Dynasty in 1911. Second Elder Song 宋二爷 in Teahouse was quite representative of the majority of the Manchurians after 1911. In Act Two of the play, an educated Song said to Fourth Elder Chang 常四爷, "Of course nobody wants to starve to death doing nothing, but who wants us Manchu Bannermen? When you think about it, maybe the Great Qing Empire wasn't so good, but I've gone hungry from the day this Republic of China began."

Towards the end of the Qing Dynasty, several Western imperialist countries were encroaching on the Chinese soil. After several lost battles with the Western countries and the ensuing humiliating indemnity treaties, the Qing court was totally powerless to defend the country. The ethnic animosity against the Manchurian nationality which lay dormant at times of the efficient rule of the Qing Dynasty now surfaced; the Han people blamed all the losses and humiliation upon the Manchurian Qing Dynasty. After the decline of the Qing Empire, the Manchurians were not only suddenly deprived of all the quondam economic, social and other privileges while they were temporarily still unfit to lead a new professional life, they were also discriminated against. In a sense, the Manchurians as a nationality fares no better than some smaller minorities in the remote parts of the country; the majority of Manchurians have been totally converted to the Han culture. The Manchurians simply do not have a geographical space in which to preserve their ethnic identities.<1>

Insofar as Lao She was concerned, his father was killed in 1900 when Lao She was barely three. The 'Great Qing Empire' crumbled in 1911. Consequently, the much depended-on supply of food and money was cut off and the whole family was on the brink of starvation and freezing to death. This part of his life was vividly recorded in Lao She's posthumously published unfinished novel Beyond the Red Banner 正红旗下.<2>

By the time of Lao She's birth, the general economic situation of the Manchurians had deteriorated to such an extent that their 'tie-gan-huo' 铁杆活, i.e. the military service and the material well-being that accompanied it could only enable them to lead a life of 'qiong-jiang-jiu' 穷讲究, i.e., a way of life that was well above their actual economic means. In the case of Lao She, his family naturally had fared even worse than most other Manchurian neighbors since the death of his father. What material satisfaction he was denied Lao She tried to seek compensations for through listening to his mother's moral-and-spiritual-strength-building stories of their family saga, through attending schools, reading, and, particularly, through frequenting teahouses.

Teahouses in those days were not merely a place for socialising, it was also a place of cultural activities. Lao She was attracted to the teahouse because there he could meet all sorts of people, see and hear all sorts of things, and, above all, enjoy the Peking operas and other verbal folk art forms. It was no accident that Lao She later chose to write a historical play that was set in the teahouse. Besides, the setting of the

play in the teahouse resulted in a brilliantly unique dramatic structure, language and characterisation. Much will be written about Teahouse in this paper.

The latest sino-Japanese war officially broke out in 1937 though the war had started unofficially much earlier in 1931. Whatever the case, when a state of war was declared in 1937, the whole nation had little difficulty burying the hatchet of ideological and military differences between the Communists and the Nationalists and building a united front against the common Japanese aggressors. On the literary and artistic scene, the All-China Artists' Anti-Japanese Association 全国文艺界抗敌协会 was established in Wuhan, Hebei Province in 1938. At the request of Mr. Zhou Enlai who was to become the first and also the longest-serving premier of the People's Republic of China, Lao She agreed to chair this newly formed national artists' organisation. It was a job that more than anything else satisfied Lao She's earnest desire to save and serve the country, to show that the Manchurians cared for their country as much as the Han people, and to personally confront the foreign aggressors in a bid to avenge his father.

If he was a inflamed patriot, Lao She was by no means a soldier. He knew clearly that if he was to help with the war effort, he could only do so in the capacity of a writer. His pen was his weapon. After closely examining and comparing his capability to write novels and his potential to become a dramatist, after realising the heart-stirring potency of the drama and the folk art forms which could reach the majority of the Chinese people, and after getting to know and learning some

basic writing skills from such leading dramatists of the time as Ying Yunwei 应云卫 , Zhang Min 章泯 , Song Zidi 宋之的 , Zhao Qingge 赵清阁 , and Zhou Boxun 周伯勋 , Lao She resolutely decided to suspend writing novels and he plunged into writing plays right away.

Another equally important factor caused Lao She to switch to playwriting. After he assumed the position of Chairman of the National Artists' Anti-Japanese Association in 1938, Lao She held a series of public, government and party posts.<3> In other words, Lao She began to lead a very public life and it took up a fair amount of his time. That was one of the reasons why Lao She remained primarily a playwright after 1949. Fiction writing is a longer process than play writing.

The change in Lao She's literary proccupation also signified a change in the writer's attitude toward literature. Before the war Lao She was mainly concerned with the individual human beings and their fate. After the war started, Lao She adopted a more or less holistic attitude toward society, culture and the interrelationship between the individual and the social progress. While the characters in his literary works remained the same-- poor and underprivileged people, they were more related to the time and its social, economic and political reality. In short, there emerged a greater sense of realism in Lao She's works composed after 1937. Most, if not all, of his plays were intended to arouse the people's patriotism in face of the Japanese invasion or to reflect the social, economic and political reality of the time.

Now, with the overview of Lao She's life and literary career, we might easily conclude that this attitude Lao She adopted toward realism, despite its correctness and appropriateness, was the first step Lao She took toward the kind of literature which was meant to be a tool of propaganda and ideological indoctrination in the hand of the Communist leadership. The Communist Party have been consistently regarded artists and intellectuals as its followers instead of allies. Literature and arts are no more than one of the several tools of propaganda. The world literary movement of realism, for example, was transformed into a Socialist Realism. In other words, literature and arts have been used to denigrate and repudiate everything of the eras before the Communist takeover of the country in 1949 which ranges from ideology and social and economic system to politics. Similarly, literature and arts have been used to praise and eulogise everything that comes after the success of the socialist revolution regardless its negative or positive impact on the social progress.

Lao She came from a poor Manchurian soldier's family and his hatred for the old society where ordinary people were tramped upon not only by the rich people but also by the foreign imperialists was complete and genuine. Meanwhile, his approval of and support for the kind of society where the proletariat were theoretically speaking their own masters were equally wholehearted. For quite a while which lasted till shortly before he committed suicide, Lao She willingly lent himself to the Party's so-called 'revolutionary' and propagandistic literature.

However, he eventually awoke to the fact that even the

Party's revolutionary literature and Socialist Realism deviated from the Marxist theory on literature. To quote Marx, "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it" and "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness."<4> In plain words, the superstructure which includes ideology, politics, literature and arts is based on the economic and social 'base'. The material interests of the dominant social class determines how people see human existence, individual and collective. Besides, Marx put forward the theory of dialectic materialism. In other words, just as the economic and social base might determine the superstructure, so the latter might also influence the former. For Marx the ideal society or human state would be what he was fond of calling the 'communist state' where the material aspect of human existence had finally caught up with the spiritual aspect of human existence, where the material and spiritual aspects of human existence were at peace with each other, and where everyone lived according to his wish.

To apply the Marxist theory to literary criticism, literature should reflect the economic, social and other reality while it should also influence the economic and social life of the human beings. In China, especially after 1949, literature and arts have been constantly subjected to the Party's absolute ideological control. Just as repeated political campaigns showed a lack of unity and democracy within the Party, so the slogan of 'letting one hundred flowers blossom and letting one hundred birds sing'百花

齐放,百鸟争鸣 showed that the socialist literature was in no way tolerant of literary points of view other than Socialist Realism. To take the Peking opera for instance, an old dramatic tradition which appealed to a large audience throughout the ages is facing the serious problem of trying to foster a new audience. This has been a direct result of forcing the century-old dramatic form to glorify the short communist history of taking over the country from the nationalist government. Instead of letting the Peking opera cater to the aesthetic habits and needs of the general public, Jiang Qing 江青, widow of the late communist leader Mao Zedong 毛泽东, gave the stage throughout the country to only the eight exemplary revolutionary Peking operas. Though what positive innovation these revolutionary operas brought to the traditional Peking opera is still an issue of much controversy, to ban all other cultural and artistic genres from the stage was a major irony to the Party's slogan of 'letting one hundred flowers blossom and letting one hundred birds sing'. The response to these operas was unsatisfactory, so much so that the young generation which grew up during the seventies developed a disgust for not just those eight exemplary revolutionary operas but also the traditional Peking opera in general.

Lao She went along with the revolutionary literature for the reason that he came from a proletarian background and the Proletariat were whom he knew well from personal experiences. But he later realised that it was not a good idea to forever subject literature to the control of the Party. Literature should not serve mostly as a propagandistic tool. His attitude toward the revolutionary literature began to change in the early 1960s. In

1962, for instance, the Party called on the country's writers and artists to produce works of art extolling the achievements the newly founded republic achieved in a thirteen-year period. Such a call as was made at the moment meant that the writer and artist should abandon any plan of writing about other subjects. This was contradictory to the Party's literary principle of 'letting one hundred flowers blossom and letting one hundred birds sing'. Lao She answered this call negatively though he was at the time still a state literary official. Instead of writing about the thirteen-year history of the new country, he chose to write his autobiographical novel Beyond the Red Banner.

This breakaway from the Party's cultural line foreshadowed his fate during the Cultural Revolution. Four years later in 1966, the 'Great Proletarian Cultural revolution' was in full swing. In fact, this was by no means a cultural revolution; it was an extreme case of how literature and arts was used not just as a tool of propaganda but also as a weapon of in-fight within the Communist Party. In other words, culture, literature and arts were manipulated by a handful of top Party and government officials who were seeking their respective political goals of silencing the opposition and having an absolute control of the political power.

In a sense, the way Teahouse was written itself showed that Lao She was dissatisfied with the so-called socialist realism. Instead of lauding the then socialist system, he chose to write a historical play. In fact, the initial criticism of the play in both its dramatic and theatrical versions was most hostile as

will be described later. Comparing Teahouse with other plays written by the same dramatist, one might perceive that Lao She was gradually and cautiously divorcing himself from the kind of revolutionary literature that the Party endorsed. Instead of capitulating himself to the Party's propagandistic literature, Lao She eventually decided to end his life by committing suicide.

Ironically, the good literature since 1949 has been that which has at some time or other incurred the Party's criticism. The TV series, River Elegy 河殤, the muckraking reportage or investigative journalism, the fifth-generation movies which are characterised by a daring experimentation with the film form and the introduction of the contemporary Western literary criticisms are attempts to break through the predominance of the so-called revolutionary literature and arts which stress the importance of the content at the expense of the form and which regard literature and arts as a tool of propaganda.

Lao She's Teahouse was staged three times in 1959, 1963 and 1979 respectively. Each new staging of the play signified a different way the Party saw the play. As a chapter of this paper will deal specifically with the dramatic production of the play, I will withhold myself from making any critical remarks here. But, the three different stagings of the play in twenty-two years show that the Party itself lacks a consistent criterion for the kind of literature it endorses and the kind that it does not endorse. This, on the contrary, shows that the so-called socialist realism is but a cloak for the Party literature which changes and fluctuates as the patronising Party changes and fluctuates.

Obviously, the Chinese revolutionary literature is not the kind of literature that a true Marxist literary theory endorses. Marx never said that literature should serve the official ideology or politics in the capacity of a tool; literature as part of the superstructure was merely based on the economic and social base. Just as obvious is the consequence of this revolutionary literature. It seems all the major writers like Ba Jin巴金, Mao Dun茅盾, and Guo Moruo郭沫若 are no longer as productive or creative as they were before they embarked upon the revolutionary literature. Even a prolific writer such as Lao She sort of dried up in the last few years of his life before he committed suicide. Between 1959 and 1966 Lao She wrote almost no novel, Beyond the Red Banner excepted. From 1964 to 1966 he produced no play as against an annual average of 1.33 plays from 1950 to 1961.

Teahouse was probably the best play that Lao She wrote. It almost became a name tag for Lao She. However, since the publication of the play there has been a controversial criticism. The play was performed in Western Europe and the United States in the early 1980s, which also brought it to the critical attention of the world. What follows is a survey of the criticism of the play and the playwright in China and overseas in the past thirty-odd years.

Lao She's Teahouse is generally regarded as a 'classic' work of art in the modern Chinese spoken play, a 'peak' of the realistic drama and a 'masterpiece'. Over the years the play has gone through different criticisms which may be roughly divided

into the following three categories: 1) predominantly positive yet unsubstantiated sweeping criticism, 2) technical criticism influenced by a leftist literary point of view, and 3) rude and unjustifiable criticism that unmistakably showed how literature was harnessed to the Party's political ideology. After the publication of the play in December 1958, Mr. Zhang Guangnian 張光年, Editor-in-Chief of the Shanghai-based Wenhui Daily 文匯報 called a forum of drama critics. Besides, the daily newspaper published a series of critical essays from 1958 to 1963. Both the forum and the newspaper commentaries positively praised the ideological and artistic achievements of the play. It was a 'good play' (Mr. Zhang Guangnian). It 'showed a strong historical atmosphere, was close to life, had a distinct national flavour and a superbly terse language' (Mr. Wang Yao 王瑤). It 'had a superb dramatic language and characterisation' (Mr. Li Jianwu 李健吾). It was 'a major achievement Lao She had in his literary career' and it showed 'a remarkable degree of terseness and precision; the characterisation of more than seventy characters which spanned more than half a century was accomplished with barely thirty thousand words.' (Mr. Chen Baicheng 陳白塵) Mr. Li Jianwu also said that Teahouse was one of Lao She's 'masterpieces' which presented a 'convincing picture of a large cross-section of society'. He added that 'only a great playwright could come up with such a good piece'. Obviously, the keynote for the initial criticism of Teahouse was positive and affirmative.

Also obvious was the fact that the above criticism was superficial as it was not based on any specificity. Though most of the critics mentioned above were established dramatists and/or

drama critics themselves, they all had an intimate relationship with Lao She. In the second stage of the criticism, critics began to look closely at the theme, structure and other technical aspects of the play. Some critics even suggested changes to the play but of course these critics meant well and wished to improve on the play in light of their 'high standard'. However, if changes had been made as suggested, then the play would have ceased to be Lao She's play for Lao She's dramatic style and innovativeness would have been lost.

Meanwhile, there appeared another criticism which was (mis)guided by a 'leftist' point of view toward literature. This kind of criticism was unavoidably 'simplistic, arbitrary, unprofessional. This criticism boiled down to four main points. First, some people criticised the play for being too 'pessimistic' as, according to these critics, the play 'did not give enough prominence' to the potential revolutionary and social force. Thus, the play violated a 'potential red line' which ran through the half-a-century-long revolutionary struggle of the Chinese people. These critics pointed out that the spies, hooligans, girl-mongers, and palm-readers in the play all had their descendants whereas such positive heroes as Fourth Elder Chang did not. Moreover, these critics criticised the play for overlooking the historical importance of those revolutionaries who sacrificed their lives for the liberation of the Chinese people after the aborted 1898 reform movement.

Second, some people criticised the play for failing to represent in an organic way the relationship between the

character and the environment they lived in. Fourth Elder Chang was a patriot. Yet, according to these critics, the play failed to spell out just how he felt when 'the liberation army was about to enter the city'. In Act Three all except Kang Shunzi 康顺子 and Kang Dali 康大力 were indirectly related to the oncoming liberation of Beijing. Thus, the play, to quote one such critic, 'failed to give a concrete representation of the new revolutionary force'.<5>

Third, some people criticised Lao She for failing to analyse the classes his characters belonged to. Lao She 'sympathised with Wang Lifa 王利发 but he failed to point out the corrupt side of his personality'; Lao She sympathised with Qin Zhongyi 秦仲义, who sought to save the country through building factories, but he forgot that Qin was a capitalist. Lao She also, rightly, sympathised with Fourth Elder Chang for the latter was a true example of the proletariat. However, in the treatment of the three leading characters of the play, Lao She, according to this criticism, committed the mistake of adopting one and the same attitude toward the three people indiscriminately.<6>

Fourth, some people criticised the play for losing its dramatic focus to a tapestry-like representation of the changing times and society. 'The play was exquisite like a string of pearls. But at the same time the pearly scenes were so attention-attracting in themselves that the organic whole of the play seemed to be in comparison poorly connected.<7>

The above is a brief summary of the several criticisms which the play received in China. In November 1980 the Beijing People's Art Theatre toured the three European countries of Britain,

France and West Germany, marking the first trip of the kind by a Chinese theatre group. The play that it performed was Lao She's Teahouse. The play was also performed in Japan in 1983, in Hong Kong in April 1986, and in Singapore in June 1986. Everywhere it went, the play was a sure hit. So far three books have been written about Teahouse's overseas performance. They are Uwe Krauter's Teahouse--Miracle of the Oriental Theatre in Europe, Zhou Ruixiang's 周瑞祥 The Unforgettable Twenty-five Days: Teahouse in Japan, and Beijing People's Art Theatre in Singapore. It seemed that the overseas reception of Teahouse was unanimously favorable. Mostly, the attraction of the play to the overseas audience was a result of the combination of a good script, the successful direction and performance of the play, the unfamiliarity of the Western world with the Chinese history and customs, and the innovativeness of the playwright in matters such as structure, characterisation and language.

The above is a sketchy account of the different kinds of criticism which Teahouse has received in the past thirty years both in China and overseas.

Notes:

1. Manchurians were primarily a nomadic race inhabiting what are the three northeastern provinces of Heilongjiang, Liaoning and Jiling which border on the Soviet Union. The Manchurians were responsible for the founding of the Jin Dynasty (1115-1234) as well as the Qing Dynasty (1616-1912). Their way of life, their customs and habits were assimilated by those of the Han people. Not to speak of the Manchurians who live in the Han-dominated areas, even those Manchurians who live in the three northeastern Chinese provinces dress, eat, live and think in much the same way as the Han people do. In a sense, the Manchurians are a people that belongs to the past.

2. Lao She started to write Beyond the Red Banner in the summer of 1961. It was an autobiographical novel but Lao She only managed to write 164 pages. Judging from the writing techniques, subject matter and language of the book, the book might be one of the best novels ever written by Lao She. According to Lao She's widow wife, this was Lao She's best novel just as Teahouse was Lao She's best play.

3. After 1949, for instance, Lao She was in turn a member of the State Council's Cultural and Education Commission, delegate to the National People's Congress, member of the National People's Political Consultative Conference, Vice-Chairman of China's Cultural Association, Vice-Chairman of China's Folk Art Research Association, Council of China's Drama Society, Chairman of Beijing's Cultural Association and Vice-President of the Sino-Korean Friendship Association, to name only some of the more important posts which Lao She held between 1949 and 1966, the year of his premature death.

4. Raman Selden, Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory (Brighton: The Harvester Press Limited, 1985), p.23.

5. Lin Muohan林默汉 and Zhang Guangnian, "A Discussion of the Several Issues Existing in Lao She's Teahouse and Hong Da Yuan 红大院 (Red Courtyard)" Literary and Art Red Flag 2 (1959) p.20.

6. Contemporary Chinese Literature Teaching Unit, Chinese Department of Liaoning University "A Discussion of the Several Issues Existing in Lao She's Teahouse and Hong Da Yuan" Literary and Art Red Flag 2 (1959) p.28.

7. Su Biyang, "Artistic Structure of Teahouse" Jiangsu Drama 1 (1981) p.46.

III. A Study of Teahouse As A Drama Text

Lao She started to write Teahouse in 1957. The play was first published in the inaugural issue of the Shanghai-based literary magazine, Harvest 收获, in 1958. The script under discussion in this chapter is different from the working script for the stage performance of the play. Although both versions were out of Lao She's hand, the latter version introduced a new character by the name of Oddball Yang 大傻杨. Unlike the conventional beginnings of the three acts in the former version, in the latter version the three acts all began with the introductory singing by Oddball Yang. This involves a structural change of the play. There are, besides, other points of difference between the first and later versions of the play. As the present chapter is intended to be a textual study of the play, no comparison between the first and the later stage and film versions will be attempted for the time being. Moreover, this chapter will deal with only those features that differentiate Teahouse from other modern Chinese spoken plays.

First, a thematic study of Teahouse. The play was divided into three acts with each scene representing one historical period in the modern Chinese history. According to Lao She's wife, Mrs. Hu Jieqing, the original intent of writing the play was associated with the first constitution of the People's Republic of China.<1> In other words, Lao She intended to write a play that would show the inevitability of the communist takeover of the country and the superiority of socialism to feudalism. Before he conceived the idea of writing Teahouse, Lao She had

written a play called People's Delegate 人民代表 . The play was supposed to be performed by the Beijing People's Art Theatre but it turned out to be a flop and it was never performed in public. The script of People's Delegate eventually landed in the waste basket. Lao She was reported to be saying to the effect of the following: A writer should never be afraid of failures because out of each failure there would come some experience and the experience, negative as it might be, would eventually bring about a positive progress.<2>

Obviously, the theme of Teahouse shows a strong sense of historicity. However, the approach which Lao She adopted to treat this historical theme was significantly different from that which he employed in writing People's Delegate. Instead of lauding the Communist leadership and the Socialist society by painting a roseate picture of the present as he undoubtedly did in People's Delegate, this time, in Teahouse, Lao She chose to dwell upon the past. The aim to compare the present with the previous societies was the same but the means towards that end was different. Which could be more emphatic, a propagandistic picture of the present, or, an objective portrayal of the hopeless past? The fate of his two plays, People's Delegate and Teahouse, was self-explanatory.

Historicity was not an unfamiliar theme in the Chinese literature. In the ancient time, the line between history and literature was rather thin, if not nonexistent at all. Si Maqian's 司马迁 Record of History 史记 was read both as literature and history unlike the book of more or less the same title

written by the Greek historian, Herodotus. The repertoire of the Chinese local operas shows a staggeringly high percentage of historical plays. History has always been a favoured topic for the Chinese writers. Of course much of the historical writing has been intended to make a point, i.e., the moral codes approved by the ruling authority had better be followed. Those who do follow these codes would have a happy and satisfactory ending and those who fail to follow them would almost invariably be punished. The punishment of and reward for whoever follows or does not follow these moral standards are substantiated in the highly visible and memorable form of history, the drama. In other words, history or the historical subject matter has been merely used to convince the reading public that they had better follow the moral standards laid down by the leading orthodox Chinese philosophy, Confucianism, otherwise they would not only be punished by the governing authority but would also be repudiated by the future generations. It is only during the recent Socialist period that an old historicity is being gradually replaced by a new historicity. The new historicity stresses the short history of the Communist struggle for power against the nationalist KMT and foreign imperialism.

Lao She's Teahouse is unmistakably a historical play. It treats the social, economic and political situation of three historical periods. Act One deals with the Reform Movement of Kang Youwei 康有為 and Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1898) and its impact on the Manchurian Qing Dynasty. Act Two deals with the historical period after the death of Yuan Shikai 袁世凱 when the country was in the control of a few warlords. And, Act Three deals with the

post-anti-Japanese War period when the country was once again in a state of civil war between the leaving nationalists and the coming Communists. As was mentioned early on in this chapter, the writing of this play was associated with the first constitution of the People's Republic of China. The time of the composition of this play was 1957. Instead of setting the play in 1957 as he most probably did in his unsuccessful play People's Delegate, Lao She chose to write a historical play, setting the play in 1898, 1908 and 1945 respectively.

The decision to set the play in the past was not a political but a cultural one. Politically, it made no big difference whether the play was to be set in the present or in the past as in both cases the playwright aimed at stressing the inevitability of the Communist takeover. Culturally, to set the play in the past was more in keeping with the traditional Chinese dramatic practice. At that time the Chinese drama was predominantly historical in subject matter while the general theatre audience were accustomed to watching historical plays or plays about the past. Besides, the literature and arts of China after 1949 were strongly influenced by the principles of the literature and arts laid down by Mao Zedong in his very important speech delivered on May 2, 1942.<3> Teahouse was a play that met all the requirements for literature and arts laid down by Mao. The play was new in content though the subject matter was historical. The spoken play was originally a dramatic form introduced to China from the west. The characters in the play were mostly representatives of all walks of life. Above all, the play was

intended to prove the inevitability of the Communist takeover.

On the other hand, Lao She was a dramatic innovator. Though at this stage he still went along with the concept of a revolutionary literature, he was at the same time eager to experiment with the dramatic form and content. The predominance of the Peking opera in the Chinese drama at that time must have inspired Lao She to borrow some techniques from the century-old local opera as a way to enrich and develop the new dramatic form of the spoken play. As the skills Lao She had a mind in borrowing were developed for and tailored to a history-saturated Peking opera, Lao She decided to write a historical instead of a modern play. This may be a bold hypothesis, but it will be proven later on in this and the subsequent chapters that Lao She was heavily indebted to the traditional Chinese drama, particularly the Peking opera in matters such as content, dramatic structure, large span of time concerned, characterisation, stage language, etc.

Now that it is established that the Chinese literature shows a preference for the historical subject matter, it remains to be studied what form this historicity usually assumes. Anyone who is somewhat familiar with the traditional Chinese drama notices that the traditional Chinese plays which make up the bulk of the local operas find a favourite subject matter in love stories of actual historical figures, the heroic deeds of patriotic warriors who fought to repel invasions from other nationalities, and historical figures who exemplify such virtues as loyalty to the emperor and filial piety to parents. Obviously, this subject matter betrays a moralising function which the ruling class hoped

that the folk or popular literature might execute, exemplify and popularise. On the other hand, it shows a general dissatisfaction on the part of the people with the existing social status quo; the general public look to the past history for a relief of their pent-up frustrations with the present situation.

A popular hero in the traditional Chinese operas was the historical figure of Bao Zhen 包拯, who was somehow able to apply the law equally to the rich and poor people, regardless of their social or economic positions. Of course the figure of Bao Zhen that looms large and prominent in the historical plays seems to be an idealised example of the lawkeeper. There exists a distance between the actual historical figure of Bao Zhen and the dramatised Bao Zhen. However, the gap between the factual and the partially factual and partially fictitious drama does not seem to matter much. The fusion of fact and fiction serves the purpose of using the past to mirror the present 古为今用 or to use the past to criticise the present 借古喻今. The significance of the majority of historical plays lies in a comparison between a not-so-desirable present and a not-much-better but a much-idealised past in a bid to indirectly criticise the present and to hope for an improved future.

Lao She had been a novelist for thirteen years when he wrote his first play, The Dispersal of the Mist, and for thirty years when he wrote Teahouse. Naturally, a successful novelist, which Lao She most certainly was, could not be too poor at characterisation. Though a successful novelist does not

necessarily make a successful playwright, nor vice versa, the skill of harnessing the language and the possession of rich life experiences were not lacking for either the novelist or the playwright Lao She. Moreover, Lao She had since his boyhood been familiar with the traditional Chinese drama, the classic Chinese literature, such folk art forms as shu lai bao and daqu singing, and, particularly, teahouse-goers. His acquaintance with some of the most prominent dramatists who joined forces in the National Anti-Japanese Artists' Association and his eagerness to use drama as a means of mobilising the common people to resist the Japanese occupation gave him a sense of direction and purpose.

Naturally, Lao She did not begin his literary career as a dramatist. Lao She was quoted as saying that his greatest weakness was in his 'a lack of the knowledge of the dramatic techniques'.^{<4>} Of course, Lao She was always modest and was constantly critical of himself as many of his analytic articles about his own literary works clearly show. (Most of such critical essays are collected in his book Lao She on Creative Writing 老舍论创作. The book has been published in several editions and it has been a major source for the study of Lao She's literary point of view and his writing techniques. However, one should not take the self-critical remarks of Lao She at their face value; Lao She was often humorous enough to make fun of himself and his writings. But fact shows that Lao She was a major contemporary Chinese writer by any standard.) However, this weakness of his was also a blessing in disguise. As he 'lacked an intimate knowledge of the dramatic techniques,'--this lack of knowledge was not an unalterable fact--Lao She was able to feel less bothered by the

traditional dramatic techniques. In other words, Lao She could afford to be innovative insofar as dramatic form, dramatic techniques and content were concerned. His Teahouse was a case in point.

Lao She wrote in an article entitled "Writing and Reading", "I never make a point of imitating any one particular style or writing technique; I write in my own way".<5> In another article entitled "On my Seven Spoken Plays" Lao She wrote, "I do not want to lose my own advantages by imitating others' merits".<6> In other words, Lao She clearly knew what his merits were and that there was a need to learn from others' merits but such an act should not temper with his own merits. "A writer produces such timeless characters as Wu Song and Dai Yu without following precedences. In a sense, the success or failure of a novel is determined by the characterisation, not the plot. Things happen and change all the time. What may be fresh at one moment may be stale in the next. Only well produced characters live on...."<7>

A reader of Lao She's plays cannot help being struck by such well-carved characters as Wang Lifa, Fourth Elder Chang and Pockface Liu 刘麻子 as in the instance of Lao She's Teahouse. As a matter of fact, Lao She took pains to portray not only leading but also minor characters in his plays. For instance, in Teahouse Fifth Elder Ma who appeared only once and who had no more than five lines in the entire play gave a vivid impression of the kind of local despots and lackeys of the foreign missionary forces in old China that rode roughshod over the ordinary people. Though

Teahouse has a list of more than seventy characters, each one of these characters has its unique place and cannot be done away with without affecting the organic whole of the play.

Another thing which was typical of Lao She's playwriting was his professed habit of first thinking out the characters before fashioning the plot to develop the characterisation. On October 1, 1959 Lao She was quoted as saying that "I first try to think out the characters; I usually do not start to write a play before I have in my mind and heart the characters in their entirety."<8>

Normally, a playwright conceives the idea of writing a play when he is hit by an inspiration as after hearing a good story. Or, the playwright has met some person or persons that he finds well lend themselves to a dramatisation. Take Lao She for an example. He decided to write a play which later turned out to be The Dragon Beard Ditch 龙须沟 after the municipal government of Beijing sponsored the dredging and transformation of a quondam filthy ditch in early 1950s. If The Dragon Beard Ditch was a result of the inspiration caused by an event, i.e., the actual facelift of a dirty creek, then Zhang Zizhong 张自忠 was written after Lao She read about a person who answered to the name of Zhang Zizhong. The play Teahouse as has been noted early on was associated with the publication of the first constitution of the newly-founded People's Public, which made Teahouse an event-inspired play.

Once he decided upon writing a play, Lao She would take time trying to think out the characters. As will be shown later on when discussing the structure of Teahouse the play was a

tapestry-like replica of three historical periods in the modern Chinese history. As Lao She did not intend to write a play of important history-makers but the ordinary people who lived the history, it would be impossible to produce a dramatic play if the playwright did not come up with a successful characterisation. The teahouse, Lao She's pick for the locale of the play, was a public ground with people of all descriptions coming and going almost around the clock. Besides, there could be no event that might tie up the whole play into an organic whole which covered more than half a century. So, Lao She decided to give the first priority to creating successful characters. Lao She's overall intent was to leave an indelible historical impression on the reader by means of creating a crop of distinctly individualised characters. Anything short of and other than that would fail to create a historical play out of a teahouse and its customers.

Just as characteristic of Lao She's dramatic technique was the precedence of the character to the plot. The relationship between dramatic characters and events is a dialectic one. There can be no events without characters. On the other hand, the specific features of individual characters will not be borne out without highly seasoned events. In Lao She's words, to capture the philosophy of human existence, one must try to get hold of and focus on that bit of human interest and significance of the relationship between the character and the plot.<9>

The relationship between the plot and the character has long been a point of much controversy. Aristotle maintained that the plot was primary and the character secondary. In his Poetics,

Aristotle listed the plot as the first of the six elements that constituted the tragedy. He defined tragedy as 'an imitation not only of a complete action, but of events inspiring fear or pity'. 'The plot is the first principle, and, as it were, the soul of a tragedy: character holds the second place.'^{<10>}

Li Yu 李漁, a Qing dynasty drama theorist, put forward an identical theory that 'The plot is the first principle'.^{<11>} Under the influence of this theory, Chinese dramatists normally set great store by creating a tightly-woven and uniform plot which is distanced from the actual reality by means of an artistic intervention.

In the eighteenth century Europe there appeared a theory which gave equal emphasis to the time, the locale and the plot of the play. But, this division of the focus of the play among the time, place and plot easily led to a neglect of the plot. In fact, the plot and the character are not contradictory but may be complimentary to each other. A careful arrangement of the plot might be conducive to the creation and intensification of the character. Shakespeare's many plays gave dual attention to the plot and the character.

An eighteenth-century French critic, Didero, made an attempt to revise Aristotle's dramatic theory by placing in the primary position the human sentiment and character. This other side of the plot-character seesaw led to the emergence of plays that played up the human sentiments and qualities while reducing the plot to its least possible importance. Plays by Chekov and Gorky gave prominence to the character and played down the importance of the plot. Wrote Jiao Juyin 焦菊隱, director of Lao She's

Teahouse, 'Gorky was good at creating vivid and memorable characters from everyday events. His writing emphasized the character. The plot was the result of the development of the character's ideas and feelings on the one hand and the result of the conflicts among characters on the other. He never sacrificed the character to the plot. The plot was forever determined by the character'.<12>

Insofar as the character was concerned, Lao She resembled Gorky. Most of the plays written by Lao She showed a strong characterisation though the plays might have momentous historical events as their background. Lao She wrote, "It would be fine if the plot is extraordinary. It will be a good piece of work if the plot in it is not so special but the character is fully developed. The character is the first principle".<13>

Teahouse is a play that excels in characterisation though it does not possess a shocking plot. Basically, the characterisation in Teahouse shows these features which are seldom found in the conventional spoken plays or even in the traditional Chinese drama. First, Lao She created a number of complex father-son characters who possessed certain almost hereditary dispositions which were closely associated with and which mirrored the changing times. Second, Lao She managed to depict the whole process in which the characters of a few leading dramatic figures were both formed and transformed. Third, Lao She did not make minor characters only serve in supporting roles; minor characters in Teahouse at times pose as important and as prominent as major characters in the play. Fourth, Lao She managed to make his

characters in the play approximate an entire society. In other words, the teahouse and its customers were a microcosm of the society.

In May 1958 Lao She wrote a reply concerning the several questions about the play. When talking about the relationship between the plot and the character in his play, Lao She wrote, "The play involves a lot of characters and a long period of time. Therefore, it is difficult for me to come up with a central story. I basically used the following four methods. First, I made the major characters live throughout the time the play covered. This way, though the story might seem prosaic, the presence of the leading characters from their adolescence to their old age would give the play a sense of unity. While dealing with these leading characters, I mainly concentrated on the characters themselves rather than the plot that involved them. In other words, the character instead of the plot was given the primary priority. Second, I made lesser characters appear in two generations; the same actor was supposed to play the role of both the father and the son. This method, like the previous one, helped to give the play a sense of continuity. There might not be a solid theoretical explanation for the inheritance of the characters from father to son. But with the same actor impersonating both the father and the son the playwright might easily enable the audience to regard the play as an organic whole, though the three acts of the play might be separated from one another by a large span of time. Third, I made a point of letting the characters tell their own life stories which were invariably linked with the changing times. This way the cook

sounded like a cook and a story-teller sounded like a story-teller. Fourth, I made the relatively insignificant characters appear and exit at a moment's notice depending on the need of the plot and character development". <14>

First things first. Now let us take a close look at the father-son characters, a technique which is seldom used in the spoken plays, Chinese or overseas, traditional or contemporary. In Teahouse there are three pairs of such characters. They are Old and Little Soothsayer Tang 唐铁嘴, Old and Little Pockface Liu 刘麻子 and Old and Little Erdezi 二德子. Coincidentally, they all fall into the category of anti-heroes. Old Soothsayer Tang appeared in Acts One and Two while Little Soothsayer Tang appeared only in Act Three. The same sequence of appearance applies to Old and Little Pockface Liu. Old Erdezi made only one appearance, in Act One, while Little Erdezi made his appearance in only Act Three. By profession, the Tang's were palm-readers and fortune-tellers, the Liu's were girl-mongers or pimps, and the Erdezi's were thugs.

Besides the three leading pairs of anti-heroes, there are two additional pairs of negative characters by the name of Old and Little Song Enzi 宋恩子和 Old and Little Wu Xiangzi 吴祥子. They were agents of the Qing court, warlords and the KMT government. Though they appeared in all the three acts, they were secondary characters and their characterisation was less complicated than that of the other three pairs of anti-heroes.

Obviously, this kind of characterisation is not usually found in the spoken play. It is, however, more often used in the

novel. The reason why Lao She employed this approach was at least twofold. First, Lao She was skillful in characterisation. Besides, Lao She was less conformative to the conventional dramatic technique as he had always insisted on writing novels or plays in his own way. Moreover, he knew what his advantages were.

Second, Lao She had an intimate knowledge of the traditional Chinese drama represented by the Peking opera. The traditional Chinese drama which had a strong preference for the historical subject matter was less demanding insofar as the space of time was concerned. Though the Western play might imply a long passage of time through the use of flashbacks, the main dramatic event was usually confined to within one day. The technique of flashback was not a Western patent; it was used in the Chinese drama, too. In addition to the flashback, the long passage of time was also actually executed in the traditional Chinese play itself. Whatever the case, the duration of a dramatic event from its initial outbreak to its denouement could last more than one day in the classical Chinese drama.

His intimate knowledge of the genre of the novel, his exposure to the traditional Chinese drama, and his insistence on writing plays in his own way combined to introduce the technique of the father-son joint characterisation into Teahouse. Another thing, the traditional Chinese drama usually gave a greater freedom to the treatment of the anti-hero or the not-so-positive character. The characters in the traditional Chinese drama were divided into five kinds. They were 'sheng' 生, the leading man; 'dan' 旦, the leading lady; 'jing' 净, the tough and straightforward guy; 'mo' 末, the middle-aged man; and 'chou' 丑,

the comedian. Besides, within each main type of characters there could be several sub-types. For instance, the 'dan' or leading male character could be divided into the 'lao dan' 老旦 or the old leading female character and the 'xiao dan' 小旦 or the young leading female character. Of all the character types in the traditional Chinese drama, the 'chou' or comic characters were given the greatest freedom in character-representation. In other words, there existed few rules regarding the representation of the comic characters on the stage. After all, the comedians were minor or secondary characters compared to other characters in a play and the effect of fun would be much diluted if a lid was put on the more or less spontaneous human expression of fun.

Insofar as the five pairs of father-son joint characters in Teahouse are concerned, Lao She did not dwell on a complicated characterisation as was evidenced by the same hereditary instead of individuated qualities observable in both the senior and junior negative characters. However, Lao She did make a point of using these characters to indirectly reflect the different social and political circumstances of different historical periods. For instance, Young Pockface Liu in Act Three was not a girl-monger as his father was. He was a covetor of Wang Lifa's teahouse and a worshipper of Director Shen's political power which could be so easily translated into an economic power and material privileges. Lao She even had Little Pockface Liu blatantly pride himself on his better-than-his-father's intelligence. Little Pockface Liu told Xiao Ding Bao, a call-girl, about how his father met his terrible end as though it was a piece of joke he

was telling. The tone with which he let out this piece of information indicated that he, Little Pockface Liu, would do far better than his father could and he was smart enough not to get burnt for whatever he did.

LITTLE POCKFACE LIU: ... It was right here that my father was seized. If you don't believe me, ask Proprietor Wang.

Right, Proprietor Wang?

WANG LIFA; I saw it with my own eyes.

LITTLE POCKFACE LIU: You see, Little Ding Bao, I am not just shooting my face off. They seized him and chopped his head off, right out there on the street - one "kecha!" with their bloody sword. Right, Proprietor Wang?<15>

This kind of characterisation was not commonly seen in other plays. This was an innovative use of both the novel-like characterisation skill together with the kind of freedom usually accorded to the characterisation of comic or lesser characters in the traditional Chinese drama. It was a technique which Lao She invented and which he used to good effect in Teahouse. It was a sure piece of evidence that Lao She was determined to write things in his own way. It was also an example of Lao She's indebtedness to the traditional Chinese drama.

If the characterisation of the above-studied joint characters was less complex, then the characterisation of such leading characters as Wang Lifa, Fourth Elder Chang and Qing Zhongyi was anything but uncomplicated. Watching the play Teahouse was like reading the whole life stories of these people from their early twenties to their seventies. Instead of using

the same technique as that used to treat those joint characters studied above, Lao She intended to make the play cover most of the active years of these leading characters' lives. In the case of Wang Lifa, Lao She successfully portrayed a small businessman who was somewhat selfish, who was sweet-tongued, and who knew how to keep abreast of the time. "When you are in business to make a living it's very important to be well-liked. I do things like my father did. If I am not dropping to my knees, in greeting, I'm dropping compliments --trying to please everybody. That way, you avoid trouble...." (Act One) And, compared with other teahouse-proprietors, Wang fared quite well; at least his teahouse did not go out of business as many other teahouses did. Yet, however good he was at adapting himself and his teahouse to the social, economic and political changes, he eventually could not escape from a disastrous end.

WANG LIFA: Reform! I have never forgotten about reform, change - keeping up with the times. When the teahouse couldn't make it, I opened a rooming house; when the rooming house folded, I tried bringing in a storyteller; when he didn't draw an audience, I even considered hiring a come-on hostess - what the hell if I lost a little face, a man has to live, hasn't he? I tried anything and everything, but only so we could live. It's the truth. Sure, I bribed people when I had to, but I never did anything unjust or immoral. Don't I deserve a normal life? Who have I wronged? Who? Those bastards in the imperial family still live a life of luxury, but I can't even get enough cornbread to fill my belly. It doesn't make sense.

(Act Three)

Fourth Elder Chang was constantly upright, outspoken and sympathetic. But how well did he fare? In Act One he was sent to jail for saying "The Qing Empire was about done for" though as a Manchurian bannerman he did not wish it to fall. In Act Two, he was a seller of vegetables but when he faced Old Song Enzi and Old Wu Xiangzi, two agents, who sent him to jail in the previous act, Fourth Elder Chang was not a bit scared and he spoke his mind. In Act Three he was old and he had no better job than selling peanuts. He was also sharply aware of death. He was a broken man physically, spiritually and otherwise.

If Chang was eternally poor, that was not so with Qing Zhongyi. He was in turn a landlord, a patriotic industrialist, and an economically and mentally bankrupt man. In Act One when he first talked to Wang Lifa he was still in his twenties, yet he put on an air of a senior man.

WANG LIFA: Aiyo! How can you spare the time to drop in on us like that? - and without even a servant.

QING ZHONGYI: Just checking - checking to see if a young man like yourself can run a place like this.

In Act Three he finally went bankrupt and he felt an imminent death. "Fourth Elder, why don't we scatter your funeral money and pay last respects to ourselves? - the three old fools."

The characterisation of these three men against different social, political and economic background over a period of forty-

eight years left the audience with an impression of the inevitable overthrow of the previous governments. Of course, due to the limitation of the dramatic form, Lao She could not describe the whole process of the changes that befell these three characters, but Lao She was most successful in presenting the changed circumstances as they were. Undoubtedly the changes that happened to these three men were nothing but tremendous. Anyone watching the play cannot help feeling that had he been in the shoes of these people, he would not have done much better, if not worse.

Besides, the changes that occurred to the three men were not groundless given the historical background against which Lao She set his play. The play covered a long period of time and involved many characters. The description of the entire life stories of a few characters might give the play some sort of connectedness and focus. "This way though the story might be loose in organisation, because the central characters were put right in focus, the play would not seem to digress too far. Nor will the play lose its focus" on the inevitability of the social changes.<16> Thus, a successful characterisation in Teahouse was most conducive to Lao She's attempt to establish the inevitability of the social changes that culminated in the founding of the People's Republic of China. The success of the play was thus also dependant on the success of the characterisation in the play.

Lao She not only set great store by creating leading characters in Teahouse, he also tried to make the minor characters become more than supporting figures. The play had more than seventy characters in all and, believe it or not, most of

the characters were not expendable or replaceable. Lao She knew that too many characters in one play tended to throw the play out of focus unless there could be a good justification for the enlisting of so many characters in one single play. Lao She wrote in an article entitled "Character, Life and Language",^{<17>} "The characters in the play should not be anybody's; nor should the number of characters be a variable figure. You should have neither one more nor one fewer character in the play. You should be absolutely sure of the characters and you should be able to visualise their smiles and their every mannerism as soon as you shut your eyes. Only when these requirements are met can you produce a good play."

No doubt playwrights usually give ample attention to major characters. Playwrights occasionally become slack in their concern for lesser characters. Such was not the case with Lao She; all the seventy-odd characters in Teahouse are lively people commanding the audience's attention the minute they make their first appearance and they linger on in the memory of the audience long after they go off stage. For example, Fifth Elder Ma appeared only briefly in Act One and he did not have more than five lines to speak. Yet, he became a sharp and full reminder of the kind of local despots and foreign lackeys that rode roughshod over the ordinary people. Besides, the brief conversations he had with Erdezi and Fourth Elder Chang were telling strokes that revealed his most prominent characteristics. One more example. Act One ended with one teahouse customer shouting, "Checkmate. You are finished!" Of course he was referring to the game of

chess he was playing with someone else. But the lines he uttered, which also served as a prophecy for the fall of the Qing Dynasty, left a deep impression on the reader. In other words, the inclusion of the chess-player customer in the cast of the play was not something accidental. Elsewhere in the play there were equally significant lines uttered by lesser characters. In short, lesser characters could also be important at times in Lao She's large-cast plays.

Among other reasons the use of a large cast in the play was to approximate a micro-society. The teahouse was a place everybody could afford to step into and sit over a cup of tea spiced with gossip, story-telling or opera-singing. It was a place where people could relax. It accommodated officials, labourers, bad guys, intellectuals and whatnot. "I knew these people. If only I could gather them all into one single place, I could use the changes that happened to them to reflect the changes of the whole society. In this way, I might be able to give the play some kind of political perspective. That was why I decided to write Teahouse." <18>

If the characterisation in Teahouse was unconventional, then the structure of the play was extraordinary. Lao She came up with a kind of dramatic structure that defied all previous categorisations. Insofar as the dramatic structure is concerned, there have been several different ways of classification. The first way of classification divides the dramatic structure into two kinds, the closed and open structure, or into three kinds which, besides the closed and open structure, also includes the character exhibition structure. By the character exhibition

structure is meant the kind of structure that gives prominence to the prosaic exhibition of different types of people. This kind of dramatic structure attempts to give an approximation of a cross section of a society. This has been a recent structure type. It may be perceived in Hauptman's Textile Workers, Gorky's At the Bottom, Checkov's Three Sisters, Xia Yan's Under the Eaves of Shanghai 在上海屋檐下 and Cao Yu's Sunrise 日出. Plays showing such a structure seek to display a cross section of a society. They usually have a large cast but lack an incident that unites the whole play. Lao She's Teahouse manifests some of the characteristics of this type of prose-like dramatic structure. Obviously, Teahouse has a large cast but it lacks a central plot-line. And, it aims at producing a microscopic vision of the changing societies.

Some other scholars tend to divide the dramatic structure into two categories, the Western and the Chinese dramatic structure. According to this way of classification, the Western play shows a high degree of unity and economy insofar as the time, locale and character of the play are concerned. In the word of Gu Zhongyi 顾仲彝, a Chinese drama professor, plays like Sophocles' Oedipus Rex, Moliere's Hypocrit and Ibsen's The Doll's House were most selective and restrictive in the number of characters that appeared on stage. These plays were also most economical in terms of the locale and duration of dramatic happenings. Besides, the plot followed a lineal line of development with the dramatic structure beginning almost always shortly before a crisis and jumping ahead right into the

climactic resolution.<19>

The Chinese dramatic structure, in contrast to the Western dramatic structure, was open-ended. Events were presented on the stage as they were from start to finish. The plot also followed a lineal line of development but it was rich in details which might be distracting at times. According to the Chinese dramatic tradition, the dramatic actions were represented in their entirety on the stage and so there was little need for flashbacks as was frequently employed in the Western drama. Lao She's twenty-five plays, with the exception of A Reunited Family 全家福, employed the open dramatic structure. They usually had a large cast and they stressed the character more than the plot. They tended to give a cross-section-like vision of the society. And they seldom used the technique of flashback though the plays usually covered a long passage of time.

Apart from possessing most of the characteristics that were associated with the kind of play that adopted an open dramatic structure, Teahouse successfully introduced a structurally operational character by the name of Oddball Yang. It was he who started the three acts of Teahouse rolling. The character was a singer of the folk art form of shu lai bao -rhythmic storytelling to clapper accompaniment. He was not much older or younger than the three leading characters of Wang Lifa, Fourth Elder Chang and Qing Zhongyi.

Oddball Yang's three appearances at the beginning of the three acts of the play not only achieved a natural linkup between one act and another, it also set the tone and colour for the ensuing act(s). In Act One, he was in his twenties. Though he

was not well off for singers of shu lai bao were beggars of some sort, he was quite energetic and optimistic as he sang favourably of the reformist movement headed by Tan Zitong 谭嗣同 and Liang Qichao. In Act Two, Oddball Yang was in his middle age. He was still wearing the same clothes he was seen wearing in the previous act, but the clothes had been worn out. The pigtail he wore in Act One had given way to long unkempt hair. And, the clappers had grown yellow with age. The song he sang showed some sort of sadness and resignation. In Act Three, Oddball Yang was old and beaten. His clothes were in tatters, the clappers were barely usable and the singer was barely able to walk. Moreover, the song that he sang was bitter and pitiable. The three appearances of Oddball Yang and the three songs he sang at the beginning of the three acts of the play were indicative of the kind of financial, physical and mental states of the teahouse and most of its owners and customers.

Apart from using Oddball Yang to signify a change of time, Lao She also used him to execute a transition of acts in the play. Relatively long intervals were required between acts of the play to allow the actors to change costumes. To make the intermissions seem shorter, and at the same time in order to briefly introduce the play, Lao She created the character of Oddball Yang who was a singer of clapper-ballads. This treatment of intermissions between acts was strongly reminiscent of the use of interludes and prologues so frequently found in the Yuan Dynasty drama. However, Lao She did not want to make his play a variety-show-like performance such as the traditional Peking

opera often was.

Lao She's brilliant idea of using the character of Oddball Yang to facilitate a transition of acts and to recount the historical background of each act, obviously, sprang from his familiar and intimate knowledge of the traditional Chinese drama represented by the Peking opera. Lao She was a teahouse-goer even when he was still in his teens. The Manchurians, it so happened, were great lovers of the Peking opera. Because they had no need to work as the Han people did and because they had a strong desire to learn from the culturally superior Han nationality, the Manchurians became gradually fond of the Peking opera, acquired such hobbies as keeping birds, and became very particular with formalities. The character of Second Elder Song was a good example. In Act Two, he was on the brink of starvation and freezing to death. Yet he was still meticulous with formalities when he greeted Proprietor Wang. He asked about the health and business of almost everyone in Wang's family and he bowed at every name he uttered. "How am I? It's hard to keep from crying. Have you noticed the things I'm wearing? They're a disgrace!" "Of course it's an oriole. I may be going hungry, but I'd never let my oriole starve. Take a look at him - come on. Isn't he a beauty? Whenever I look at him, I can't bear the thought of dying." The few quotations from Second Elder Song are enough to show how the Manchurians were fond of formalities, keeping birds and the Peking opera.

Besides, Lao She had written three Peking operas himself.<20> It could be said that Lao She who came from a Manchurian background, who frequented teahouses, who knew a lot

of people in the business of the Peking opera, and who had himself written three Peking operas was most knowledgeable about every aspect of the Peking opera and he knew how to make use of the techniques of the Peking opera in other literary and artistic genres.

The character of Oddball Yang gave the play a better unity than what the play would come up without this character. The division of the play into three acts was most cleanly and smoothly executed through the use of Oddball Yang. In a sense, the success of the play Teahouse was dependant on the structure that Lao She introduced into the play. As this chapter only deals with the text of Teahouse, that is drama as literature, I shall not dwell long on the character of Oddball Yang and the effect it had on the overall structure of the play. Oddball Yang will be studied once again in the next chapter when we study the stage production of the play.

The structure of Teahouse, though it was made unique with the inclusion of the character of Oddball Yang, showed some other special features that are worth analysis. As has been said earlier, the traditional Chinese drama was on the whole open-ended insofar as the structure was concerned. It gave an extensive coverage of the kind of details that would be otherwise avoided in the Western drama. It emphasized a representation of a plot from its start to its finish. Besides, the traditional Chinese drama would often enlist a large cast of characters in order to help represent a plot in its temporal and spatial entirety.

Admittedly, the spoken play which Teahouse was was a dramatic form that was introduced to China from the West. Lao She was a lecturer of the Chinese culture and literature in the London School of Oriental and African Studies. His stay in London also exposed him to the Western literature, drama included. Lao She was an admirer of Moliere and Ibsen. He read almost all of their plays. Though he was far from being a dramatist at that time, he learned a lot about the Western drama. However, insofar as the dramatic structure was concerned, none of Lao She's twenty-five plays adopted the kind of dramatic structure normally found in the Western drama. The structure of his plays rather followed the Chinese dramatic tradition. Moreover, some of his plays showed an innovative use of some of the techniques associated with the traditional Chinese drama as the above-mentioned instance of the character of Oddball Yang showed.

Hypothetically speaking, Lao She's not following the Western dramatic tradition in writing the spoken play, which began as a Western artistic genre, had to do with his insistence on writing things in his own way, his tactfully-emphasized assertion that he was not a dramatist in the first place - he could well assert that he was primarily a novelist - and his relatively old age when he went abroad. The first two hypothetical causes have been touched upon early on in the paper, so I shall omit a repetition. The third point is worth analysis here, though.

The early 1920s saw a tide of young Chinese intellectuals going abroad to study humanity sciences in the West. Lao She managed to go abroad, too. However, he was not a student; he was

an instructor of Chinese culture and literature in London. Teaching his own culture and literature to foreign students made Lao She more conscious of his cultural and literary background. Meanwhile, his exposure to Western culture and literature also made him objectively reflect on Chinese culture and literature. Another factor was that Lao She was twenty-seven when he went to Britain. Counting the number of years he had worked in different capacities, Lao She had had more than seven years of working experience. Besides, he was nine years older than the average age of those members of the Creationist Society 创造社 who also went abroad. He was five years Guo Moruo's 郭沫若 senior, eleven years Yue Dafu 郁达夫 and Tian Han's 田汉 senior, four years Xu Zhimo's 徐志摩 senior and seven years Hu Shi's 胡适 senior.<21> A difference in age could mean a less susceptibility to foreign ideas on the part of an older Lao She. Though it did not mean that Lao She was conservative because he was not, it did mean that Lao She was more influenced by Chinese cultural and literary backgrounds than his junior writer friends. In other words, Lao She was more aware of a discrepancies between the two cultural and literary traditions than his junior fellow would-be writers who were nearer their formative years than Lao She. If these young literary people were more impressed by the alien culture, then Lao She was more critical of both Chinese and the foreign cultures.

Therefore, Lao She was not indiscriminate in copying others' styles or techniques. He was more independent in the choice and formation of his own techniques. Small wonder it was that Lao She

did not use the dramatic techniques characteristic of the Western tradition. Nor was he keen on trailing in the foot path of the traditional Chinese dramatic tradition. What he did was bearing in his mind what he wanted stylistically, making innovative use of the techniques characteristic of both traditions, and tearing down as much, as possibly and as sensibly as he could the barrier that came between one literary genre and another. The application of the novel-oriented characterisation in Teahouse was a fine example of how Lao She managed to make both the novel and the drama learn from each other. Consequently, the end product of Teahouse could not be easily fit into the category of either the Western or the Chinese dramatic tradition. In other words, the structure of Teahouse was not totally something out of the mould of the Western or the Chinese dramatic tradition.

So much about the structure of Teahouse. Now some general remarks about the peculiar language of the play. Not infrequently, Lao She was called a master of language. True to this description, Lao She made the language in Teahouse reflect not only the different historical periods but also the emotions, personalities and life experiences of the highly individualised characters of the play. The language Lao She used in this play showed his wit, his sympathy for the poor and unfortunate people, his hate and despise for the spies, parasites, girl-mongers, lackeys of foreign imperialism, eunuchs, and the old societies, his wish for a fundamental social change, and his respect for patriotic and upright people like Fourth Elder Chang.

Lao She wrote in a reply in May 1958 to some enquiries and controversial criticism about his play, "Without life experience,

there could be no vivid language. I had some life experience concerning the old society. I knew all sorts of teahouse-goers. I knew what they did and I knew what they talked about and how they talked. With this knowledge as a basis, I exaggerated their language a bit here and gave it some colour over there. The result was a language which was as much the teahouse-goers' as mine. Take Soothsayer Tang for instance. He had quit smoking opium in Act Two but he started to smoke heroin. He was a shameless person. He did say, 'I have given up opium.... I have switched to heroin.' However, what he said next was what I made him say. 'British Imperial Cigarettes and Japanese heroin - I'm being looked after by the big boys. Now, wouldn't you call that good fortune?'"<22>

The language of traditional Chinese drama was mostly poetic, the main reason being that the playwrights in the old days were mostly disillusioned scholars. The poetic language was what they had learned and what they had hypocritically learned to respect. Besides, as the traditional Chinese opera included also singing, the words that made up the songs would naturally be rhymed so as to produce a good and pleasant sound effect. Also, the traditional Chinese opera set great store by stylisation which meant that it respected old literary and dramatic conventions.

The monologue and dialogue in the traditional Chinese opera was comparatively vernacular. While the lyrics were usually sung by leading actors and actresses, the prose speeches were spoken by all the characters. The language traditionally found in the Peking opera, for example, was a colloquial and semi-classical

language that lent itself well to the prose monologues and dialogues. Thus, poetry or lyric poems made up the bulk of the songs found in a traditional Chinese play while the prose went into the monologues and dialogues in the play.

Lao She of course had no intention of writing a Peking opera of Teahouse. However, the language he used in the play showed an identical orality.<23> Besides, the sentences were as terse and as expressive as poems. Moreover, Lao She was able to spice the character-building language with wisecracks, ironies and exaggerations. It would be safe to say that the fine language in Teahouse did a lot to contribute to the successful characterisation of the play.

Take Proprietor Wang Lifa for example. Wang was by profession a teahouse-keeper who was aware of the importance of having a waggly tongue. The curtain lifted to reveal a Wang Lifa who was beaming with success in Act One and the same curtain dropped on a same but desperate Wang Lifa who was thinking how he might rid himself once and for all of the misery and the sense of defeat in Act Three. The minutest change in Wang Lifa was recorded by the speeches which he uttered. And, every slightest feeling was transmitted to the audience or reader through a masterful use of the language by Lao She. So wonderful and miraculous was the language that an easy identification was established between the characters in the play on the one hand and the audience or reader on the other.

Wang was a good teahouse-keeper. He knew how to deal with all sorts of people from Eunuch Pang down to beggars. His attitude toward Old and Little Soothsayer Tang could well show

his good skill in dealing with undesirable people yet not risking having a scene. Old Soothsayer Tang knew that he could not do his business of fortune-telling without coming to Wang's teahouse which was always packed full with customers. But soothsaying was not so prosperous a business in those days. Every time he came into the teahouse, he would always try to have a free cup of tea from Proprietor Wang. Somehow Wang had always tried to put up with him probably because he thought that it was not worthwhile creating a scene in front of his customers simply over a cup of tea. However, the deteriorating economic situation did not fail to make a mark on Wang's attitude toward Pang. Here is a dialogue between the two people in Act One.

SOOTHSAYER TANG: Proprietor Wang, show a little kindness to old Soothsayer Tang a bit. Give me a bowl of tea and I'll tell you your fortune. Come on, let me see your palm - won't cost you a cent. It's 1898, the twenty-fourth year of Emperor Guangxu's reign. And your age....

WANG LIFA: Forget it! There's no need to ply with that old fortune-teller's gab - I'll give you a bowl of tea. Fortune-telling's useless. In this country people like us are always underdogs anyway. Sit down. You know, if you don't break that opium habit nothing good will ever come your way. That's my way of telling foretunes - much more effective than yours.

Here we see that Wang was both reproachful and sincere whereas Tang was both brazen-faced and pitiable. However, both

Wang and Tang were humorous in their speeches.

In Act Two there was another dialogue between Wang and Tang.

SOOTHSAYER TANG: Proprietor Wang, I've come to wish you the best.

WANG: Yo! Elder Tang? There'll be no more free tea here. Say, you must be doing well. Dressed in silk no less.

....

SOOTHSAYER TANG: Oh, I've given up opium.

WANG LIFA: Really? Say, you must really want to get ahead.

SOOTHSAYER TANG: Actually, I have switched to heroin. Look, "Hademen cigarettes - for length and an easy draw." Deftly remove a little tobacco, and you've got a perfect place to put the heroin. British Imperial Cigarettes and Japanese heroin - I'm being looked after by the big boys. Now, wouldn't you call that good fortune?

WANG LIFA: Good fortune, indeed. Indeed. But the rooms are all taken. Whenever one comes vacant, though, I'll keep it for you.

This time Wang was really disgusted with Tang and he was determined that Tang should not be a free boarder as he had been a free tea-drinker. In contrast, Pang was more brazen-faced and pitiable at the same time. He was now doing better financially than previously but his smoking habit got worse.

If Proprietor Wang had had to put with Old Soothsayer Tang in Act One and Two, then he found he could not tolerate Little Soothsayer Tang in the third act.

LITTLE SOOTHSAYER TANG: Old Proprietor, turn your face this way. Let me see now.... Good. Promising forehead. Still some good luck left in that old carcass of yours. Well then, how about a bowl of tea?

WANG LIFA: Little Soothsayer Tang!

The three dialogues between Wang Lifa and Old and Little Soothsayer Tang showed most of the characteristics of the dramatic language Lao She used in Teahouse. First, it was specially tailored to each individual character. Wang was a proprietor and to create a scene in the teahouse was the last thing he had on his mind. Besides, he knew how to weigh his loss against his credit. He would give Tang a free bowl of tea every now and then but he would not let Tang have a free room at the back of his teahouse. Obviously, the former involved only a little money while the latter would cost quite something to Wang. After all Wang Lifa was a proprietor of a teahouse. He would not cherish the idea of driving away customers nor would he bear the thought of running a losing business if he could help it. On the other hand, Tang was a swindler who made a living out of fortune-telling and sponging on others. More than that, he was an opium- and heroin-smoker. However, Tang knew no shame and he could even make fun of his horrible habits if doing so would bring him a free bowl of tea.

Second, Lao She's language was both immensely humorous or bitingly sarcastic depending on how one reads or hears it. Wang was cross with a brazen-faced Tang. Yet, he knew that it would not do much good if he let his anger show. So, he used a

reproachful and humorously sarcastic tone to talk to Tang. He denigrated Tang's profession by telling him that he could make a better fortune-teller because he at least had the sense to know that opium-smoking was a costly and harmful habit to keep. Wang was able to let out his anger and despite with the help of a well-devised language which Lao She proved himself to be a language master by creating. Besides, Tang was a crook who made a living out of fortune-telling. As a fortuneteller, Tang was capable of making black seem white and white black. Likewise, he could make opium- and heroin-smoking seem a respectable hobby.

Third, the language Lao She used in the play showed a high degree of orality. The sentences were short, usually no longer than ten words. There was an infrequent use of adjectives or adverbs. Short inverted sentences were often used in the place of long, involved and perfectly grammatical sentences. There was a higher degree of repetition. Besides, exclamatory words were found in almost every sentence. Also, there were sometimes omissions of the subject in the sentences.

Of course, these and many more linguistic features that were associated with orality could not be easily found in the English translation of the play. This was because the Chinese language had a different grammar from that of many Western languages. For one thing, the Chinese language was strongly influenced by a poetical or lyrical literary tradition. Many classical Chinese poems tended to lack a subject, a tense indicator, an object or whatnot. Besides, a Chinese word might be used both as a noun and as a verb, and sometimes also as an adjective or adverb depending

on the linguistic context in which the word was used.

Lastly, Lao She was most familiar with and influenced by the Peking opera. He himself once wrote three Peking operas and adapted some Peking and other local operas into modern spoken plays. In other words, the high degree of orality in the Peking and other local operas was something he consciously or unconsciously tried to introduce into the modern spoken play. Besides, Lao She was a one-time writer of clapper-ballads, cross-talks and several other forms of folk art. One must bear in mind that most of the folk art forms exist in their verbal form; they are not intended for visual reading. Therefore, the success and popularity of these art forms depend on how verbal or how oral they can be. Lao She was well trained insofar as orality was concerned. Lao She summarised his achievement in the dramatic language in an article entitled "Dramatic Language" by saying, "I want to explain one thing: the practice of language should never be confined to within one single genre. It should include all and every other genre.... Guo Moruo and Tian Han were good at writing prose, poetry and drama. This was because they had a solid training in the language skills".<24>

In the same article Lao She was quoted as saying, "More than forty or fifty years ago when students studied the essays by the eight famous Tang and Song Dynasty essayists, they read, chanted and recited them at the same time. The modern prose was usually not so musical but that did not pose too big a problem. However, musicality or orality should not be missing from the dramatic language because the dialogues among characters were transmitted to the ears of the audience through the mouths of the performers.

Musicality or orality was the bridge between the mouth and the ear" i.e., between the performers on the stage and the audience off the stage. A good method of insuring a high degree of orality or musicality in the dramatic language was, according to Lao She, to read aloud every word that the playwright wrote down and let the ear decide whether the words were of the right choice. Lao She not only read aloud his own works to himself, he also made a habit of reading aloud his plays to the performers and directors. As a matter of fact, some changes were made in the original written text of the play in the process of Lao She's reading aloud Teahouse to the performers and directors of the Beijing People's Art Theatre. The next chapter of this paper will be dedicated to a study of the differences that exist between Lao She's original script and the script developed for the stage performance of the play with the participation and absolute approval of Lao She.

Notes:

1. Beijing People's Art Theatre, Theatrical Art of Teahouse (Beijing: Chinese Drama Publishing House, 1980), p.189.
2. *ibid.*, p.188.
3. Mao Zedong gave a speech in Yen'an, the seat of the Communist leadership, during the War of Resistance against Japan, on May 2, 1942. The speech was entitled "Speech at the Yen'an Forum on Literature and Arts". Mao pointed out in the speech that "we should take over the rich legacy and the good tradition in literature and arts that have been handed down from the past ages in China and foreign countries, but the aim must still be to serve the masses of the people. Nor do we refuse to utilise the literary and artistic forms of the past, but in our hands these old forms, remoulded and infused with new content, also become something revolutionary in the service of the people".
4. Lao She, Lao She on Literary Creation (Shanghai: Shanghai Culture and Art Publishing House, 1980), p.147.
5. *ibid.*, p.216
6. Lao She, Literary Creation and Language (Hong Kong: Culture and Education Publishing House, 1981), p.130.
7. Lao She, Lao She on Literary Creation (Shanghai: Shanghai Culture and Art Publishing House, 1980), p.83.
8. *ibid.*, p.178.
9. *ibid.*, p.90.
10. Hazard Adams, ed., Critical Theory Since Plato (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1971), p.51.
11. Ye Changhai, History of Chinese Drama (Shanghai: Shanghai Culture and Art Publishing House, 1986), p.372.
12. Jiao Juyin, Collection of Articles on Drama by Jiao Juyin (Shanghai: Shanghai Culture and Art Publishing House, 1979), p.90.
13. Lao She, Lao She on Literary Creation (Shanghai: Shanghai Culture and Art Publishing House, 1980), p.89.
14. Beijing People's Art Theatre, Theatrical Art of Teahouse (Beijing: Chinese Drama Publishing House, 1980), pp.183-184.
15. The English translation of Teahouse used in this paper was attributed to John Howard-Gibbon whose translation of the play was published by Beijing's Foreign Languages Press in 1980.

16. Beijing People's Art Theatre, Theatrical Art of Teahouse (Beijing: Chinese Drama Publishing House, 1980), p.183.
17. Lao She, Lao She on Drama (Beijing: Chinese Drama Publishing House, 1981), p.110.
18. Beijing People's Art Theatre, Theatrical Art of Teahouse (Beijing: Chinese Drama Publishing House, 1980), p.183.
19. Sun Huizhu, A New Exploration into the Structure of the Spoken Play (Beijing: Chinese Drama Publishing House, 1983), p.50.
20. The three Peking operas written by Lao She are: Zhong lie tu (A Portrayal of Loyal Warriors) (1948), Wang jia zheng 王家鎮 (Wang Jia Township) (1948) and Qin xia dan xue 青霞丹雪 (Qin Xia and Dan Xue) (1959).
21. Song Yongyi, Lao She and Chinese Cultural Concepts (Shanghai: Xueling Publishing House, 1988), p.20.
22. John Howard-Gibbon, trans., Teahouse (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1980), p.29.
23. By orality here is meant that the drama language in Lao She's plays is characteristically verbal. In other words, Lao She's drama language possesses many linguistic features that are usually associated with the kind of spoken language used by the majority of people in their everyday life. By orality here is not meant the kind of linguistic features existent in a language prior to the emergence of a written language.
24. Lao She, Lao She on Drama (Beijing: Chinese Drama Publishing House, 1980), p.150.

IV. A Theatrical Representation of Teahouse

Teahouse has been staged three times, in 1959, 1963 and 1979 respectively. The first two stagings of the play were short-lived and there was a large discrepancy between the official criticism and the general audience' reception of the play. As was mentioned in the second chapter of this thesis, the initial criticism of the play, Teahouse, was divided. While the dramatic circle including drama critics and theatre people positively appraised the play, the theatrical performance of the play was short lived because the play did not fit in with the leftist literary policy and line of the Party. Though the play was staged a second time in 1963, the political climate at the time was unfavorable and the performance did not last much longer than the previous time. In 1979 shortly after the downfall of the 'Gang of Four' Teahouse was staged for a third time. This time the play was not only extremely successful with the general public it for the first time also received the Party's official assessment. As a matter of fact, the play was so successful that it was soon turned into a film-award winning movie in 1982.<1>

This chapter will focus on the theatrical side of the play. In other words, this section of the paper will examine the difference between the original and the performance texts of the play, the difference between the traditional Chinese and the Western way of stage performance, and the contribution the stage design, the directors and the audience made to the successful performance of the play.

One will find many differences between the first written text of the play and the text that was used to put the play on to the stage. As was mentioned earlier on, Lao She participated in and approved of many of the changes that occurred to his original script. He had developed a very intimate relationship with the Beijing People's Art Theatre. Every time he had written a play, he would go to the theatre, gathered together interested performers as well as directors, read aloud his text to them, discussed the text with them, made necessary changes and worked together with the directors and performers till the play was actually put on to the stage. In fact, this was the normal procedure by which all of Lao She's major plays were brought on to the stage by this theatre group.<2> Insofar as Teahouse was concerned, both the stage performance and the film versions of the play were performed by the Beijing People's Art Theatre.

In the performance text<3> of the play, apart from the addition of the character of Oddball Yang and the clapper-ballads, there are other structural, linguistic and plot changes. Act Three in the theatrical version of the play, for instance, ended with Proprietor Wang committing suicide at the back of his teahouse that was to be occupied by Little Pockface Liu and Director Shen. What a big coincidence that Lao She, the playwright of Teahouse, also ended his life by committing suicide at the initial stage of the Cultural Revolution in 1966! The end of the first written version of the play, in contrast, was Director Shen exclaiming 'Good!' when he heard that Proprietor Wang had committed suicide. The 1979 theatrical version of the play put Director Shen only in the background. He never made an

actual appearance on the stage.

The reason for this change might be complex. For one thing, too many characters on the stage might cause problems to stage management. The original cast as Lao She had created it consisted of more than seventy characters. Though most of these characters are necessary, if not indispensable, there are quite a few that can be excused from making a theatrical appearance especially in view of the need to update the show to match the political, social, historical and critical perspective of the time the play is staged.

Besides, though prosaic, the play told a touching story of three old people of Proprietor Wang, Fourth Elder Chang and Qin Zhongyi. It made perfect structural sense if the play could end after the three old men gave themselves a mock funeral and after Wang Lifu hanged himself off scene at the back of the teahouse.

During an interview while the Beijing People's Art Theatre was staging Teahouse in Japan in 1983, Director Xia Chun told some Japanese dramatists how the change in the ending of the play came about. "After the play was written, Lao She asked the performers of the Beijing People's Art Theatre for their candid opinions about the play. The performers agreed that Act Three was a bit too complicated. Act One had many characters but the sense of direction of the play was crystal clear. Act Three also had many characters on the stage but the sense of purpose was not as clear as in Act One. When the play was being staged for the first time in 1959, Mr Jiao Juyin confided in Lao She and his colleagues that it was hard to handle the last act well unless

the three old men could be brought to the centre of the act.

"But, Teahouse was like a string of pearls insofar as the individual scenes were concerned. Besides, each of the seventy-odd characters was glamorous in his own way. As the three old men were not invariably the centre of the first two acts, it was difficult to make the audience aware of the importance of the three men in the first act and to keep this awareness through to the last act."<4>

At first, the Beijing People's Art Theatre thought about placing the three old men in the most prominent position of the play and making them the centre of the audience's attention while making other characters hinge upon them. Though it was not put into practice in 1959 and 1963, the idea was not abandoned. As a matter of fact, the directors and performers of the play kept discussing the possible change to the ending till 1979 when Lao She had been dead for fourteen years.

"If Lao She were alive," Director Xia told the Japanese counterparts, "he would buy the idea because the fate of the three old men was like a piece of thread that joined the entire play together. At first, we doubted if the audience could have the patience to sit through the show, but fact shows that such a change in the ending of the play has brought about good theatrical effects."

There are, besides, other significant differences between the three stagings of the play. For example, in the 1959 version of the stage performance, there were more than twenty additional teahouse-customers not found in the original written script of Lao She's play. These characters were already on the scene before

the appearance of Soothsayer Tang, the first character to make an appearance in Act One according to Lao She's original text. According to the original script, there were no such scenes. But such a change was necessary because the few scenes of teahouse-customers served well to give the play a temporal and spatial 'situatedness'. Such scenes might be unnecessary in the script since the reader usually took it for granted that the playwright's stage instructions were adequate and substantial enough. And they may well be so because the economical stage instructions function only as an imagination-arouser instead of a presenter of physical scenes. If the stage instructions in the form of the written language were sufficient to the reader of the play, then the same would have to take the form of highly visible and audible scenes in the theatrical version of the play. This involves a change of the medium, which will be accounted for in the sixth chapter of this paper when a comparison will be made of the three artistic forms of Teahouse. Let it suffice here to understand that any one stage rendering of a play is inevitably different from other stage, other generic or artistic renderings of the same play. Because of the 'situatedness' of a play, the same directors, the same performers, the same audience and the same other elements that go into the theatrical performance of a play cannot stay the same.

Though new characters such as non-speaking teahouse-customers are added on, that does not mean that all the original characters in the original drama text cannot be excluded from the theatrical appearance. The difference between the newly-added

characters and the kind of expendable characters found in the original text lies in the rationale that the former are needed to give the play a historical focus and a sense of reality whereas the latter can be deleted depending on how the director interprets the play in light of his understanding of the text, the playwright, the audience, the political, social and other determinants. The character of Director Shen was not totally omitted as the audience could well hear about him from Little Pockface Liu. But the ending of a play is important not only because it is a place usually reserved for the climax of the play, it is also because of the structural unity of the play. What else can be more climactic than the unusual death of a leading hero? Structurally speaking, it is better than otherwise for the play to end with Wang Lifa as the play also began with him. Just as the curtain in Act One lifted to reveal a young and energetic Wang Lifa in a thriving teahouse, so the curtain in Act Three dropped on an old and desperate Wang Lifa committing suicide at the back of a teahouse that was to change hands -- the teahouse was to house a trust company that dealt in whores, jeep-girls and come-on hostesses. In short, there is some good sense in changing the ending of the play the way it was changed in the 1979 edition of the performance.

Lao She wrote the original text of Teahouse in 1957. Though by this time he had had a fair knowledge of the stage, the theatre and the audience, there were still many things he could not be sure of. As the play Teahouse was something revolutionary both in the content and the form of the socialist drama - some of these peculiarities have been discussed in the previous chapters,

Lao She had no way of anticipating all the technical problems that might occur in the process of putting the play on to the stage. That was why he made a point of going to the theatre and discussing possible changes with the directors and performers. Lao She was good at acting upon sensible suggestions made by the directors and performers. For instance, the directors and performers convinced Lao She that the stage performance of the play could use some technical help that might facilitate the transition from one act to another. Lao She accepted the suggestion and the result was the inclusion of the character of Oddball Yang and the clapper-ballads.

The previous chapter discussed to some extent the structural change brought about by the inclusion of Oddball Yang and the clapper-ballads. By way of avoiding any repetition, this chapter will study the theatrical effect that such an inclusion brings. Lao She wrote an explanatory note concerning the three clapper-ballads. 'Relatively long intervals are required between the acts of this play to allow the actors to change costume. To make the intermissions seem shorter, and at the same time to briefly introduce the play, some clapper-ballads (kuaiban)快板 have been included. Oddball Yang, who recites them, is to be considered a member of the cast.'⁵ The function of Oddball Yang and his clapper-ballads seems to be twofold as Lao She explained above. But there may be a third function, namely some kind of alienating effect and a sense of objectivity which are expected of the act of reading history. There is no need to repeat how history-oriented the classical Chinese literature was and how even the

revolutionary literature sets great store by 'making the past serve the present and making the foreign serve the Chinese.'

History is what happened prior to the present time. Unlike literature which needs a great deal of imagination, history needs a kind of objectivity which distances itself from any emotional overreaction. In a sense, literature may be based on fiction or non-fiction but history in the real sense of the word is based on fact. Teahouse is a historical play that has an ideological message to sell: socialism is decidedly superior to semi-feudalism and semi-colonialism. Lao She aimed at proving with a historical review that only in a socialist society could the ordinary people be their own masters. So in this case history was blended with a socialist and a by-no-means unpropagandistic literature. In other words, the audience was not just expected to passively watch a historical show, it was also expected to compare a detestable past with a much improved present, a comparison which the playwright wished would lead the audience to conclude that whatever that was of the present was better than its past equivalent and that the future would be still better.

With Oddball Yang and his ballads, the audience can be repeatedly called back from a passive relationship with the past that is being represented on the stage so that the audience can be urged to also objectively reflect upon the past and to somehow relate the past to the present.

Before Act One begins, Oddball Yang appears on the stage dressed in the traditional attire of the late Qing Dynasty, beats a pair of clappers and sings a ballad that specifies the historical, social, geographical, economical and political

background of the first act. Oddball Yang and his ballads function in much the same way as the prelude and interlude function in the traditional Chinese drama. It aims at distracting or dismissing the audience's sense of complete identification with whatever the play is recounting. As this chapter will take up the issue once again shortly afterwards while analysing the relationship between the performer on the one hand and the dramatic personae on the other, a relationship which will bring in a larger issue, that of the difference between the traditional Chinese and Western schools of performance, suffice it here to understand that the use of Oddball Yang and his clapper-ballads in Teahouse also creates a distancing or alienating dramatic effect.

Apart from the change in the ending of the play and the inclusion of Oddball Yang and his clapper-ballads, changes are also made in the dramatic plot and language. Characters such as Director Shen 沈处长; Little Xinyan 小心眼, a nineteen-year-old come-on hostess; Che Dangdang 车当当, a thirty-year-old speculator in silver dollars; and Old Yang 老杨, a pedlar in his thirties were deleted from the 1979 stage version of the play.

The reason was simple: the stage could not sensibly accommodate as many as over seventy characters enlisted by Lao She in the original written text of Teahouse. The stage needs a greater concentration and focus than the novel or the written drama text normally requires. The latter assumes that the reader takes it for granted that whatever the writer says is true and real. If the writer writes that such and such an event occurs in

a certain place at a certain time, all the reader does is to imagine in his mind a spatial and/or temporal approximation of what the writer says that the event is. Or, one might say that the less physically visual a literary scene is, the greater the need there is for the reader's imagination to fill in the visual blank. By the same token, the more physically visual a literary scene is, the less imaginative the audience is expected to be. This is probably because a reader of a literary text has only his linguistic knowledge and his imagination to fall back on whereas a watcher of a show has at his service not only his senses of sight, smell and hearing but also his linguistic faculty and his imagination. Chapter Six will concentrate on the medium difference between the written text, the stage and the film. So I will save the main arguments for Chapter Six.

Changes were also made in the dramatic language. Generally speaking, the changes were made to increase the degree of orality. Longer sentences were cut short, normal sentences were inverted, more exclamatory words were introduced, and sentences were added, dropped, moved about, and split. The language Lao She was accustomed to using had a strong local colour. Taken as a whole, Lao She's plays about Beijing were a dictionary of the colloquial expressions used by Beijing residents. In fact, a dictionary of the colloquial Mandarin expressions used in Lao She's many a play was compiled by Yang Yuxiu 杨育秀. <6> As there are more important things to go into concerning Lao She's play Teahouse, priorities will be given to those bigger points. Besides, it has been an uncontested fact that Lao She was a great master of the Chinese language. So, due to the limited space of

this paper, I will not try to prove a proven case that Lao She was a great master of language.<7>

Having covered some of the more important textual, structural, plot and character changes observable through a comparison of the first written text of the play and the 1979 version of the stage performance, I would now like to move on to the next task -- to compare the traditional Chinese and Western schools of performance insofar as the relationship between the performer and the dramatic personae is concerned.

Insofar as the performing art is concerned, three systems are particularly noteworthy. They are the Stanislavski system, the Brechtian system and the traditional Chinese system, by which is meant the performing art of the Peking opera. In general terms, the Stanislavski system is characterised by a psychological and emotional involvement on the part of the performers whereas the Brechtian system has a view to distancing the audience from the performance rather than joining them together. The Chinese system does a dual wonder of not only representing the character's psychology and his emotions but also drawing attention to the performing skills of the actor who impersonates the character on the stage.

In fact, the Stanislavski system was a modern Western tradition whereas the kind of performing art represented by the Peking opera was a typically traditional Chinese performing art. As to the Brechtian system, it was a result of the convergence of both the Western and the Chinese traditions. Brecht formulated his style of performance after, shall we say, a partial or one-

sided exposure to the Chinese system in 1934 when Mei Lanfang 梅兰芳 happened to be on a performing tour to Moscow. Brecht was struck by what he later termed the alienating effect of the Peking opera, in which actors seem to be ever conscious of the audience's existence as well as the roles they are playing and who are constantly self-monitoring their every gesture, facial expression and every sound of their singing. This is because the Peking opera operates on a high degree of stylisation; the way the actors sing, speak, act and do acrobatic fights follows a century-old style which has developed into a binding theatrical grammar.

Thus, a theatrical study of the play Teahouse mostly involves a comparison of the Stanislavski and the Chinese systems of performing art. This is because, on the one hand, Teahouse happens to fall into the category of the spoken play, and, on the other hand, Lao She's indebtedness to the Peking opera insofar as theatricality is concerned is quite obvious. The character of Oddball Yang and his clapper-ballads were added on when the Beijing People's Art Theatre was trying to execute a smoother transition between one act of the play and another and at the same time to find a more economic way of informing the audience in matters such as the historical background of each act and the major developments of each act. Besides, the play exhibits an exceptionally high degree of orality such as one which strongly reminds the Chinese audience of the Peking opera.

As a full comparison of the Western and the Chinese systems of performing art entails more space than what may be accorded to this paper which mainly studies Teahouse in its different

artistic forms, as Teahouse is categorically a spoken play despite the fact that the play also displays some features generally observable in a Peking opera, and finally as the play is prominent in characterisation and orality, it is, therefore, necessary to take a closer look at the relationship between the performer and the dramatic personae in accordance with both the Western and the Chinese systems of performing art.

The Western dramatic tradition began with Plato and Aristotle. Setting aside their arguments concerning the function of literature, we notice that the Western literary tradition as a whole laid a heavy emphasis on imitation. Wrote Aristotle, "Epic poetry and tragedy, comedy also and dithyrambic poetry, and the music of the flute and of the lyre in most of their forms, are all in their general conception modes of imitation" and "Imitation, then, is one instinct of our nature. Next, there is the instinct of 'harmony' and rhythm, meters being manifestly sections of rhythm".<8>

The way arts imitate nature in the west differs from the way arts imitate nature in China. While the former seeks a facsimile-like representation of nature, the latter seeks to represent the essence or spirit instead of the appearance of nature. This difference in the way nature is imitated is manifest not just in literature but also in arts in general. The same difference is discerned in the Western and the Chinese music, dance and painting. An Actor Prepares<9> is a book according the actor the helping hand to get over the threshold of truthful performance. Stanislavski taught a combination of the psychological and the

physical. In other words, to get at the unconscious, according to Stanislavski, one has to identify himself totally with the character's psychology, his desires, loves, hates, whatever; then with the help of the external techniques, the actor-character gives natural physical extension to those emotions and feelings along a logical line.

If this Western performing art may be analogised to the art of photography, then the Chinese performing art can be analogised to the art of painting. Like painting, the Chinese performing art gives attention to the bold lines of a general impression other than the fine lines of the details. In contrast, the Western style of presentation pays greater attention to the fine lines of the details. Though the audience has to use its imagination to restore the general impression which it receives from the Chinese performing art into a concrete event or realistic person, the traditional Chinese drama is also a realistic art though its relation with the reality seems indirect because after all both the general impression and the dramatic details all spring from the same realistic source.

Because of the predominant position the actor occupied in the initial stage of the Chinese drama, the theory of 'spiritual imitation' was put forward and emphasized. Its first proponent was Shu Shi 苏轼, a Song Dynasty (960-1279) literary celebrity. The emperor of the Chu State during the East Zhou Period (BC770-BC256) was recorded to be believing that one of his dead friends had come back to life after he watched a play.<10> Shu Shi explained that the wondrous theatrical effect was achieved through a successful spiritual imitation of the emperor's dead

friend.

Another reason for the creation of the Chinese school of performing art is that the ancient Chinese performers also made efforts to make drama reflect life as it was. But because the social and economic conditions in China was still rather backward at the time, such attempts at a photographic realism that was dependent on a relatively high level of material wealth were given up. Instead, the ancient Chinese artists developed a kind of performing art which was highly stylised, schematic and symbolic. Interestingly, this simple style of performance somehow heightened the aesthetic pleasure and satisfaction. Just as a capable painter can portray a touching picture with a few sketches, so the Chinese performing art can come up with a realistic impression of nature with a simple performing style.

Though the written drama soon emerged in China, the oral drama and the performer-centered drama were not weakened. By the time of Tang Xianzu 汤显祖, a more elaborate theory of the actor's creation was formulated. It emphasized the actor's concentration, an ultimate goal of spiritual resemblance, a close observance of nature, and an independence from material temptation.<11>

In short, the Western dramatic system by Stanislavski stresses an exact internal and external representation of the character whereas the Chinese dramatic tradition is primarily concerned with the capturing and representation of the spirit or essence of nature. This difference in the way nature is represented also leads to a difference in the way the actor impersonates the dramatic personae.

In the Western system, particularly in the spoken play, the relationship between the actor and the dramatic personae is one of deliberate merging. In other words, the actor goes out of his way to merge himself with the character in every possible way so that he might come up with an original copy of the character during the two or three hours of a performance. What dictates while the actor is performing on the stage is not what the actor thinks or feels but what the character thinks and feels. In comparison, the relationship between the character and the dramatic personae, according to the Chinese tradition, is one between appearance and spirit. In other words, what the actor tries to embody is not the appearance of the character but the character's spirit. This is similar to the Chinese landscape painting. Instead of portraying the physical existence of one particular river and mountain, the Chinese landscape painting sets out to represent what a painter believes to be the spiritual likeness of all the rivers and mountains. In other words, the river and the mountain do not look exactly what a camera lens shows them to be. Instead, the river and the mountain as they are represented in the Chinese landscape painting possess probably most if not all the features that the river and the mountain in their collective sense may possess.

Besides, the painting is veiled in a sort of mysticism. Taoism which was instrumental in the formation of the Chinese poetics considered the state of 'tastelessness' as a supreme and most beautiful state.<12> Characteristic of the Tao, the supreme beauty is hard to name and taste though it is attainable. According to Zhuang Zi 莊子, everything was derived from and was

included in Tao or Way. He also stated that Tao was invisible and impalpable but it was real, that Tao transcended time and it was absolute, and that Tao was the origin of everything in the world.<13> In other words, the painting, if it was a good one, was derived from and was a reflection of the supreme knowledge of all and everything. It was not supposed to be just a realistic representation of one particular river or mountain.

To return to the relationship between the actor and the dramatic personae in the traditional Chinese drama, the actor did not aim at giving a physical outward bound representation of the character. He adopted such a way of performance that would not only represent a spiritual resemblance of the character but would also excite the audience to imagine and make the audience aware that it was watching a show instead of the real historical occurrences. The Peking opera had throughout the ages developed an artistic form which incorporated not only speaking (spoken play), singing (opera), dancing (ballet) but also acrobatic fighting (acrobatic show). Categorically, what belongs to several Western artistic genres was grouped together under one single Chinese artistic form which was the Peking opera.

Insofar as acting is concerned, the performer makes use of the multiplied expressiveness of the combined artistic genres, represent the character not as what the latter is in real life but as what he is made out to look like by a highly stylised and symbolic way of performance, a way of performance that has been custom developed to bring out the spirit of the character. In the old days the female characters in the Peking opera used to be

impersonated by male actors. But as both the performer and the audience were interested in giving a transcribed physical appearance to the spiritual likeness of the dramatic personae, the audience had no difficulty identifying the male actors from the female characters. On the contrary, the audience might experience a greater sense of aesthetic pleasure watching a male-actor-cast-in-female-character kind of performance. In other words, the relationship between the performer and the dramatic personae in the traditional Chinese drama represented by the Peking opera was one between a transcribed appearance and a spiritual likeness of the target for the artistic representation.

The objective of developing such a way of performance was to, on the one hand, enable the audience to reflect not just on the individual fate of one specific character but more importantly on the fate of the entire human race, and, on the other hand, to give the audience a greater aesthetic pleasure through a variety-show like performance which does not aim so much at creating an illusion as at reminding the audience that it is but a show it is watching.

One more general observation before moving on to the dramatic production of Teahouse. The director system of the Western and Chinese theatre production was a fairly recent development. By director is meant the person who is most responsible for the overall translation of a written script into a theatrical performance of a play. In China before the late Tang Dynasty there was no such a person as the director in a theatre group. In most cases the playwright was the person who partially served as the director. He worked with the theatre group,

answering any questions which the performer might have regarding the play as well as suggesting possible ways to put his play on the stage.

Meanwhile, the performers, especially the leading ones, tried to interpret the roles they were supposed to play and then they resorted to the performing skills they had either learned from their teachers or they had had the courage and intelligence to invent themselves. In a way, the success of a play in the old days was dependent on how good the playwright and the performers were.<14>

Teahouse is undoubtedly a modern spoken play. Yet apart from exemplifying most of the generic features of the spoken play, Teahouse also exhibits some features that are usually associated with the Peking opera. It is needless to prove once again how Lao She, the playwright, was taken to the Peking opera and how he even wrote some Peking operas himself. But the influence of the Peking opera clearly shows itself in the exceedingly high degree of orality in the language of the play and even more so in the way the performers of the play say those lines. Besides, insofar as theatricality is concerned, the play introduces the character of Oddball Yang who resembles the typical Peking opera character in some significant ways. Last but not least, the play makes a point of revealing the spirit or the essence of the characters in the play not through the conventional plot manipulation but through a series of isolated and seemingly undramatic happenings.

There is no better place to begin than the character of Oddball Yang. As was mentioned early, this character was added on

in order to satisfy the technical need of a smooth and informative transition of the acts of the play in the theatre. Lao She could have thought of other solutions to the problem but he eventually decided on the character of Oddball Yang and the clapper-ballads.

Obviously, the explanation for this addition was the influence of the Peking opera. The subject matter for most of the Peking operas and Teahouse was history which was being tapped to indirectly indoctrinate the audience in what the ruling class at the time believed should be the orthodox attitude toward the present social, economic and political status quo. In the case of Teahouse Lao She professedly wanted to prove the inevitability of social changes and the superiority of socialism to semi-colonialism and semi-feudalism.

Besides, Lao She was trying to give a wide-angle view of the society that had seen a series of fundamental changes. This was unlike the slice-of-life approach customarily adopted by the majority of the spoken play. However, Lao She's historical approach in his play resembled the traditional way history was dealt with in the Peking opera. Instead of making the play start shortly before the climax of the show as was customarily done in the spoken play, Lao She made the play give a snap-shot like portrayal of not just one but three consecutive historical periods while he cleverly used the father-son hereditary and from-youth-to-old-age characterisation to connect the three separate acts. This treatment of the historical subject matter was not in line with the spoken play which mainly follows the Western dramatic format because the spoken play was a dramatic

form introduced from the west. However, the treatment of history in Teahouse was quite in agreement with the practice of the Peking opera.

Oddball Yang, not unlike the traditional character in the Peking opera, made a clean breast of his background, profession and point of view the moment he set foot on the stage. He began his first clapper-ballad with "I'm Oddball Yang, a balladeer...". There was no way the audience could be illusioned to think, at least for the brief moments Oddball Yang was on the stage recounting the history and life story of the characters of the play not just by word but also by song of mouth, that the surrounding darkness in the theatre had projected the audience into whatever temporal and spatial situation the play set out to approximate and represent. This was because Oddball Yang clearly stood apart from the other characters of the play; he sort of functioned like an omniscient narrator/character in the novel though he also appeared to age and change with the time as his three appearances on the stage clearly showed. He was forever at the edge of the central happenings of the play and his existence was a reminder to the audience that they were in a theatre watching a historical show. Besides, he sang rather than spoke on the stage, something which was unusual in the spoken play but was perfectly in line with the Peking opera.

Apart from Oddball Yang who gives a strong indication of the influence of the Peking opera on Teahouse's stage performance, characters like Qin Zhongyi, Eunuch Pang, not to speak of Wang Lifa, makes there first appearance on the stage much in the same

way as characters in the Peking opera do. Director Xia Chun 夏淳 wrote, "Because of the shortage of time needed for the rehearsal and also because of our desire to make the play reflect the nationalistic, cultural and stylistic features of the Chinese people, we decided to incorporate some techniques traditionally used in the Peking opera.... The traditional way characters make their first appearances on the stage in the Peking opera was adopted in the production of Teahouse".<15>

To use a Peking opera jargon, the first appearance a character makes on the stage is called 'liang xiang' 亮相. 'Liang' means 'to show' when it is used as a verb as in this context. It can also mean 'bright' when used as an adjective. 'Xiang', on the other hand, means 'appearance'. Taken together, 'liang xiang' means 'to make a dramatic appearance, whose effect is heightened by the use of a strong light'. Though in the Peking opera a character takes advantage of his first appearance to make a self-introduction like what Oddball Yang does when he makes his first appearance on the stage, in Teahouse which falls into the category of the spoken play most characters make their similarly dramatic first appearances by showing with their costume, gestures and well-uttered stage lines, and, with the help of the concentrated sound and visual effects, their unique social, economic and cultural background. In the case of Qin Zhongyi, his first appearance was preceded by a preparatory sound effect of an approaching carriage. As soon as Qin emerges, he is flooded by an increasingly bright light. Being a rich man and owner of the estate on which the teahouse is built, Qin puts on an air of careless arrogance. Meanwhile, Wang Lifa, owner of the teahouse,

hurries over to Qin and makes a deep Manchurian-style bow and takes over the horse whip from Qin. Though by this time, Qin has not even uttered one sound, it is enough to make the audience as well as the other characters in the teahouse know that a somebody has appeared.

In the Peking opera, when a character first appears on the stage, he makes a clean breast of his identity, background and his relationship to whatever the opera is about. Besides, the first appearance of a major character takes quite a long while with the actor-character sails with one slow and dignified step after another to the centre of the stage in full customary splendiddness. Oftentimes, this first appearance is accompanied by the actor-character singing a lengthy song or by a show of his acrobatic expertise while the light is centred on him and the sound from percussion instruments and the music do an effective job of emphasizing his very first appearance.

Of course the stage production of Teahouse does not copy indiscriminately the kind of first appearances of characters used in the Peking opera. However, the effect is highly dramatic. Such kind of first appearances as are made by the leading characters in Teahouse may seem too dramatic for the realistic stage which makes a point of representing things as they exactly are in real life. However, what first appearances made by the characters in Lao She's play are in tune with the personality and disposition of these characters except that the personality and disposition of these characters have been condensed into a few highly dramatic moments. This treatment of the characters in Teahouse on

the other hand is a reflection of the kind of classical Chinese critical tradition. As was touched upon early, the Chinese critical tradition stresses a spiritual likeness rather than a physical imitation.

Besides, the Taoist tradition which is instrumental to the formulation of the technical aspect of the Chinese critical tradition aims at achieving an ulterior artistic state of 'tasting the tastelessness' 味无味. In other words, what the audience experiences is not a taste that can be described but a taste that is nameless. Such critical standards as 'charm' 韵 and 'taste' 味 are used in the Chinese critical tradition. An ancient Chinese cuisine expert by the name of Yi Jun 伊君 was recorded to be saying the following with regard to cuisine: The changes in the cauldron are so subtle that one cannot name or describe them. (鼎中之变, 精妙之微, 不可言, 志弗能喻) Obviously, what Yi Jun talked about cuisine can be so paraphrased that it can be made to refer to art.

Psychology and life experience tell us that we first see and hear before we develop a sense of taste. However, compared with hearing and seeing, tasting maintains the sensual stimulation for a longer period of time. We also know from psychology and life experience that our sense of taste is a composite sense. There are four basic types of taste: sourness, saltiness, sweetness and bitterness. These four tastes are associated with our sense of smell, our sense of temperature and a sense of touch towards the food. Similarly, the feelings the Taoist tradition tries to create through a piece of literary work are manifold. People often feel tongue-tied when they attempt to express the subtle

feelings they feel after an exposure to a work of art. Little wonder the ancient Chinese poetics used the metaphor of taste to distinguish good from bad works of art.

The techniques used in the Peking opera were developed under the strong influence of the Taoist poetics. Lao She, on the other hand, was strongly influenced by the traditional Chinese drama insofar as the structure, the subject matter and the language of Teahouse are concerned. When brought on to the stage, the play makes no secret of borrowing from the techniques used in the Peking opera as the above-quoted words of Director Xia Chun clearly showed.

As was mentioned early, the language used in the traditional Chinese drama was verse and a highly oral kind of idiomatic vernacular speech. Needless to say, the ballads sung by Oddball Yang exhibited a high degree of orality. In fact, the speech by other characters in the play also showed a high degree of orality. Lao She wrote, "One must know that the dialogue is the sound of a character's personality.... The playwright should make each line a character speaks reflect the feeling and emotion he experiences at each twist of the plot development. In other words, the playwright should ask himself what line he is going to put into a character's mouth and, more importantly, how the character is to utter that line. If well placed, a sigh will sound more eloquent than a long speech. Similarly, a half-uttered word or mere silence might be more effective and informative than if a character makes a clean breast of his heart and mind.... It certainly matters what a character says but it is decisive how he

says it...."<16>

The brief dialogue between Fifth Elder Ma, Erderzi and Fourth Elder Chang in Act One is a case in point. Altogether Ma has no more than four or five lines to speak and each line is not more than nine characters long. Yet, his character is clearly brought out by this most brief dialogue.

FIFTH ELDER MA (without bothering to get up): Erderzi, you're quite something.

ERDERZI (looking around, spots Fifth Elder Ma): Ho! Fifth Elder Ma, I didn't know you were here. How careless of me not to have noticed you. (Goes over and drops to one knee in the traditional gesture of respect.)

FIFTH ELDER MA: If there's a problem, you should settle it in an amiable way. What's the point of going round threatening people?

ERDERZI: Of course, sir. You're quite right. I'll go and join them in the inner courtyard. Third-Born Li, I'll pay for the tea at this table. (Goes to inner court.)

FOURTH ELDER CHANG (Walking over to Fifth Elder Ma to continue argument): You, sir, you're an intelligent man. Who do you think's in the right?

FIFTH ELDER MA (Rising): I've got other things to attend to. Goodbye. (Exits.)

FOURTH ELDER CHANG (To Wang Lifa): Oddball, that guy.

WANG LIFA: Didn't you know that's Fifth Elder Ma? You're probably on his black list now.

FOURTH ELDER CHANG: Do you think I've offended him? I

should've taken the Almanac's advice and stayed home today.

WANG LIFA (Whispering): You were just condemning the foreigners. Well, he works for the foreigners. Follows their religion, speaks their language. Whenever he wants something done he goes straight to the Magistrate of Wanping County. Why else would even officials be afraid of provoking him?

From this exchange of words, the audience got to know what kind of people Erderzi, Fifth Elder Ma and Fourth Elder Chang were respectively and what a complex social background it was. This was because every line spoken by the characters, in the word of Lao she, 'flowed out of the lives of the characters'.

Directors and performers could make much out of such life-originated lines. If Ma does not have many lines to say, he surely certainly has an expressive body language. While rehearsing the play, Director Jiao Juying wanted there to be some kind of sound effect which might be heard in the vicinity of the teahouse. Someone suggested the church bell. The director approved of the idea but he purposely did not tell Mr Mi Tiezeng who was cast in the character of Fifth Elder Ma about this sound effect arrangement. Yet when Mi cast in Ma heard the church bell, he improvised a gesture - taking off his cap and drawing a cross in the air. This gesture was more expressive than any other visual, audio or verbal language that had been so far employed in depicting Fifth Elder Ma's relationship with the Western missionary force in China on the one hand and his relationship with other Chinese citizens on the other.

Here in the stage performance of the play, the already

character-mirroring language of Lao She's original script was enhanced by the addition of a bodily language, the sound effect, and good performers who were capable of giving each line in the original script a higher degree of orality. The language of the play had a ring which is distinctively Pekingese. The performers of the play were mostly Peking residents who used the Peking dialect in their everyday life. Moreover, the performers were well acquainted with the dramatist Lao She who read to them his newly written plays and asked them for their opinions. It was not coincidental that all the major plays by Lao She were exclusively staged by the Peking People's Art Theatre which was first set up as a comprehensive spoken play, opera, ballet, and orchestral troupe.<17>

It follows from the above examples that the performers of Lao She's Teahouse also made a point of trying to capture and represent a spiritual likeness of the dramatic personae. Besides, Lao She successfully created the character of Oddball Yang who differentiated himself from the other characters in the play; he not only functioned as a reminder to the reader that they ought not to be carried away by the play and should meanwhile be reflective on the history, he also functioned as an all-knowing narrator/character frequently found in the modern novel such as F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby. Besides, all the performers of the play took advantage of their familiarity with their native dialect which happened to be the Beijing dialect in a bid to inject a heightened degree of orality into the lines they uttered on the stage in the capacities of the respective roles they impersonated. Last but not least, everybody from the

playwright to the performers of Teahouse was steeped in the traditional Chinese drama represented by the Peking opera. Lao She had written three Peking operas and the performers of most of his plays used to belong to an ensemble which not only put on spoken plays, operas, ballet shows but also gave orchestral performances.<18>

So far we have examined the difference between the original written text and the stage working text of the play. We have also studied the relationship between the performer and the dramatic personae in both the traditional Chinese drama and the modern Western drama. Now we shall see in what way the stage design, the audience as well as other theatrical setup contributed to the success of Teahouse.

The Beijing People's Art Theatre had made more than four hundred performances both in China and overseas when the play was made into a movie.<19> It was probably the longest running modern spoken play in China. A large span of time (50 years), an unusually large cast (over seventy characters), and a relatively prosaic dramatic structure and plot made it difficult for the stage to come up with a convincingly presentable and enjoyable production of the play. What was to overcome these technical difficulties was the spectacular stage design and the readiness of the audience to imaginatively go along with the play's plot development and characterisation.

In Act One the teahouse on the stage was represented by eight large tea tables. In the front row from the left to the right were placed Tables One to Five. Behind Table Four in the

second row was Table Six. To the far left of Table Six were Table Seven and Table Eight. At the back of the stage was a big door. The kitchen and the courtyard were adjacent to the two sides of the teahouse. The characters in the play were assigned their seats at the tables according to their importance to the play and according to the sequence, frequency and duration of their appearances on the stage.

In Act One the first table was occupied by an old man who made a living by writing letters for others. Next to him at the second table was to be seated Eunuch Pang. On Pang's right at Table Three was to be seated Qin Zhongyi. Qin was a patriotic capitalist and also the owner of the estate on which this teahouse was situated. He was a leading character throughout the play. On Qin's right at Table Four was to be seated Fourth Elder Chang and another Manchurian by the name of Second Elder Song. Like Qin, Pang was a central character. On the extreme right at Table Five were seated two chess-players. In the second row at Table Six which was placed near the gate of the teahouse were seated two spies in civilian clothes. Table Seven was occupied by three ordinary teahouse customers. At Table Eight was Fifth Elder Ma who was a lackey of the Western missionary forces.

Wrote Wang Wengchong 王文冲, chief stage designer of the play, in an explanatory article, "The seating of the characters at the eight tables resulted from a careful analysis of all the characters and a careful arrangement of the individual scenes. The original script, for instance, had no such character as an old letter-writer but he was added on in order to facilitate the scene in which Pockface Liu helped Eunuch Pang to get a wife.

When Soothsayer Tang saw Qin, he wanted to read the latter's palm. But since he did not know Qin, he asked the letter-writer for information. Besides, the lease by which Kang Liu's daughter was sold was written by this old letter-writer. When Pockface Liu asked Kang Liu to leave his finger print on the lease, Liu got the ink from the letter-writer. These scenes brought the old letter-writer and his table to life". <20>

Because the first act of Teahouse called for an exceptionally large space and because of the need to play up some characters, the eight tables were not of the one and same size. The three tables and seats thereof in the front row were comparatively taller than the other tables and chairs. This gave a better spatial perspective to the stage. It also gave prominence to the important characters.

The two spies were inconspicuously seated at Table Six. But the table was nearest to the front gate. Of course spies usually operate in inconspicuity. Besides, the fact that they were seated closest to the door signified their role as watchdogs of the government. When Fourth Elder Chang said that the great Qing Empire was about to end, the two spies sprang up but immediately sat down again.

The arrangement of the characters around eight tables facilitated the development of such scenes as that between Qin Zhongyi and Eunuch Pang concerning the aborted Hundred Days Reform, and that between Qin Zhongyi and Fourth Elder Chang which concerned their different attitude toward the poor people represented by two beggars. Besides, since the more important

characters were seated around the tables that were near the centre of the stage, the play acquired an enhanced sense of relevance and focus which were indispensable to a history play with a prose-like structure.

The above was of course the stage design for the first act of the play. As the teahouse and its proprietor fared worse and worse in the consecutive acts, so the teahouse on the stage became smaller and the light became dimmer. The number of tea tables decreased and the space got smaller. On the one hand, new facilities such as a gramophone were brought into the teahouse though one thing remained unchanged in the teahouse throughout the radical social, economic and political changes. That was the poster: "Don't Discuss State Affairs!" And, Proprietor Wang had had to repeatedly remind the customers that they should not bring the discussion of state affairs into the teahouse either by pointing to the omnipresent poster or by uttering aloud the warning on the poster. This showed that Proprietor Wang was aware that to make a living at that time, one should make a point of not getting involved in the politics, not by any chance. Fourth Elder Chang was put in jail for saying that he feared the great Qing Empire would end, Pockface Liu was summarily executed after some military police mistook him for an army deserter, the students who boarded in the back of the teahouse were molested by spies like Song Enzi and Wu Xiangzi, Wang Lifa's family and Kang Shunzi had to flee the teahouse in fear of being executed on account of Kang Dali, an underground communist member, and finally an apolitical Wang Lifa had no way out except committing suicide. The gradual decline and the ultimate destruction of the

teahouse showed the inevitability of the fate of the ordinary people and also the inevitability of social changes in favour of the ordinary people.

As Lao She put it, the theme of his play was the 'burial of three historical periods'. Translated into the stage design, the theme took the highly visible form of a teahouse which underwent a series of radical changes in the setup, space and light effect of the teahouse. Besides, changes were made in the angle through which the teahouse was represented in front of the audience's eyes. In Act One, the teahouse was represented from the front with eight large tea tables showing the teahouse in its entirety and spatial depth. In Act Two, the centre of the view was shifted rightwise. Now the teahouse was no longer thriving and part of it was converted into a boarding house for students. In Act Three, the teahouse became even smaller as part of the estate that was used by Qin Zhongyi as a warehouse was confiscated by the government. In contrast to the decreasing teahouse, the same slogan 'Don't Discuss State Affairs!' grew larger and larger. The sense of oppression by the evil forces symbolised by the decreasing teahouse eventually drove Proprietor Wang to commit suicide.

The stage design of the play was quite successful insofar as the translation and transformation of a verbal play into a highly dramatic play were concerned. Changes were made in the process of the dramatic production of the play. The introduction of the character of Oddball Yang and the clapper-ballads not only executed a smooth transition between the acts but also changed

the entire structure of the play. The addition and deletion of other characters were, however, made by the directors and performers in the process of the dramatic production. Changes of a technical kind are unavoidable in the actual staging of one play as there was a medium difference. Chapter Six will take up the issue of medium difference.

Apart from the peculiar stage design which gives an identical epic spatial and temporal scope of the play in its written form, the sound effect also played an important part in the successful dramatic production of the play. After a careful study of the play, the directors and the stage designers opted for a realistic sound effect. All the three acts were set in the one and same teahouse. Besides, the three acts all took place in the morning. However, the three acts were supposed to represent three different historical periods. So the sound effect was expected to provide the necessary historical background for the three acts.

Apart from giving the three acts of the play some kind of realistic historical background, the sound effect was also expected to help create and strengthen a dramatic unity. Because the teahouse in question was located by the road, such sound effect as that which accompanied the activity on the street in the vicinity of the teahouse was adopted. Here of course the sound effect was not the kind that was usually found in the Peking opera. After all, Teahouse was a spoken play, a dramatic genre introduced to China from the west. But in the hands of Lao She and the Beijing People's Art Theatre both of which were steeped in the traditional Chinese drama, the sound effect

created in the theatrical performance of the play was partly identical to that found in the Peking opera and partly identical to that found in the usual spoken play.

In fact, the stage instructions Lao She wrote at the beginning of Act One enabled the reader and the audience to have not only a visual but also an aural impression of the kind of place the teahouse in question was. "....Every day bird fanciers, after strolling about with their caged orioles and thrushes, would come in to rest awhile, enjoy a pot of tea, and compare the singing abilities of their birds. Go-betweens and those who had deals to discuss also frequented such teahouses. In those days there would often be quarrels between gangs, but there were also always friends about to calm them down.... In the teahouses one could hear the most absurd stories, such as how in a certain place a huge spider had turned into a demon and was then struck by lightning.... Here one might also hear about the latest tune composed by some Peking opera star, or the best way to prepare opium...."<21> It was thus obvious from the stage instructions that Lao She paid great attention to creating an appropriate sound effect for his play. He depended also on the sound effect to represent in front of the reader or the audience the three historical periods. The decision to set his play in a teahouse itself showed how much Lao She as a playwright cared about the sound effect.

Act One occurred in one fall morning in 1898. Such sound effects as the flying doves, the passing water wagons, hawkers, and the natural sounds normally heard within the teahouse were

introduced. These sounds, according to the designers of the sound effect, were supposed to impress the audience that the teahouse was doing a thriving business at this stage.

Apart from these general sound effects, special sound effects were also used to help the identification of particular characters when they made their appearances. For instance, before Qin Zhongyi appeared in Act One, the sound of a pausing carriage was heard, a sound which suggested the coming of an important and also rich customer. Fifth Elder Ma's halting his steps and drawing a cross in the air the moment he heard a church bell was all too memorable and character-strengthening.

Act Two occurred in the first decade of the present century when China was torn among several warlords. It was also a period which saw an increasing Western influence. Such sounds as imported cars, songs sung by passing soldiers and religious songs and music combined to leave an unmistakable impression of the late 1900 Beijing City. Inside the teahouse, such sounds as were made by the pirating soldiers and the blackmailing spies drove an optimistic and flexible Proprietor Wang crazy and desperate.

Act Three occurred towards the liberation of the Beijing city where apart from the sounds made by military trumpets, newsboys and demonstrating students, the audience could also hear the sigh, groan and despair of the three old men.

In short, the sound effect was geared to the creation of a realistic setting or background for the three respective acts of the play. On the other hand, the sound effect played the role of building up the characters. Above all, the most significant sound effect came from the expertly-uttered lines by the seventy or

more performers of the play. The already marked orality in the well phrased lines written by Lao She was enhanced when the lines were uttered by the performers who were most familiar with the kind of dialect the play used and with the performance of the traditional Chinese opera.

Insofar as the stage design and the sound effects are concerned, the audience also played an important part in their success. The traditional Chinese drama had a great expectation on the audience. The stylised and symbolic nature of the stage setup and the dramatic movements of the performers demanded the audience to imaginatively participate in the plot and character development of the play.

Insofar as the theatrical performance of Teahouse was concerned, the audience was captivated by as well as distanced from the historical review of the play. On the one hand, the audience found it easy to identify themselves with the dramatic personae since the play aimed at a realistic representation of history. On the other hand, such characters as Oddball Yang and his clapper-ballads reminded the audience of the traditional Peking opera which tended also to distract the audience from a complete identification with whatever was being represented on the stage. The audience was not in a state of passivity; it also deliberated on what it had so far seen on the stage. Besides, the broad spatial and temporal scope of the play - three historical periods and over seventy characters - tended to have a prose-like effect on the audience whose attention was spread over a long time span and a large cast. Thus, the audience had to call into

service their imaginative faculty as well as their objective and historical perspective toward the past history. Moreover, because the writing of the play was closely associated with the publication of China's first constitution after 1949, Lao She had wanted to put across to the reader or audience the idea that the communist takeover was inevitable and the socialist system was superior to all previous systems. And he did manage to sell his point not through positively portraying the present (1957) but through a negative as well as realistic portrayal of the undesirable past (1898-1947). Thus, what point Lao She intended to put across to the reader or audience came not directly but indirectly as a moral lesson. On the part of the reader or audience, it had to decode a message from its indirect to its direct form. Imagination and intelligence were tapped to yield a meaningful and significant understanding of the play.

Notes:

1. Teahouse was brought on to the screen by the Beijing Film Studio in 1982. It won the Hundred Flower Film Award in the following year.

2. Most of the major plays written by Lao She were brought on to the stage by the Beijing People's Art Theatre. Apart from Teahouse, the Beijing People's Art Theatre also staged Lao She's Dragon Beard Ditch, Camel Xiangzi and The Shopkeeper Girl. Interestingly, these plays were not only some of Lao She's masterpieces, they also remained in the repertoire of the Theatre. And, more importantly, the stagings of these plays helped to train a whole generation of actors and laid a solid foundation for the Theatre.

3. The English translation of Lao She's Teahouse used in this thesis were attributed to John Howard-Gibbon's English translation of the play. The English text of the play was published by the Foreign Languages Press in Beijing in 1980.

4. Zhou Ruixiang, The Unforgettable Twenty-five Days: Teahouse in Japan (Beijing: Beijing Publishing House, 1985), pp.161-162.

5. Lao She, Selected Works of Lao She (Chendu: Sichuan Culture and Art Publishing House, 1986), p.359.

6. Yang, Yuxiu, ed., Vocabulary of Beijing Dialect in Lao She's Works. Beijing: Beijing University Press, 1984.

7. It is known that the common speech 普通话 is derived from the Beijing dialect. Lao She's literary works, fictions or plays, show a strong local color which is a combination of the colloquial expressions that are highly visible and audible in Lao She's works and the kind of homespun humor traditionally associated with the Beijing residents. In fact a dictionary was compiled regarding the typical Beijing dialect and colloquial expressions used in Lao She's works. (See Note 5.) It was small wonder that the initial favorable criticisms of Lao She unanimously and rightly recognised Lao She's achievement in the literary language. Besides, Lao She's contribution to the literary language also took the form of cross-talks, an equivalent of the Western comic talks, local operas, and some other folk art forms.

8. Hazard Adams, ed., Critical Theory Since Plato (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Johanovich, Publishers, 1971), p.48 & p.50.

9. An Actor Prepares was written by Konstantin Sergeevich Stanislavski. It was translated into English by Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood and was published in 1936. It was a systematic summation of the Western dramatic performing art.

10. Emperor of the Chu State was led to think that his dead friend had come back to life not because the dramatic impersonator of his dead friend looked exactly like the emperor's friend (形体相似) but because the impersonator was able to capture the spiritual likeness of the emperor's dead friend (得其意思所在). By '意' and '思' were meant that bit of resemblance between the impersonator and the impersonated which activated the audience's imagination multiplied by the audience's longing to meet the impersonated once again.

11. Jiao Juyin, Collection of Essays by Jiao Juyin (Beijing: Beijing Culture and Art Publishing House, 1986), p.157.

12. Lao Zhi put forward the notion of 'tasting the tastelessness' 味无味. The first of the two '味' is a verb which means 'to experience or to taste' while the second '味' (taste) together with the word '无' (not having) is a noun. In other words, Lao Zhi applied the Taoist concept of Tao or Way 道 to literary criticism; Lao Zhi considered 'tastelessness' as a taste, and a supreme and most beautiful taste. Characteristic of Way, the supreme beauty is hard to name and taste though it is attainable.

13. The Chinese philosophical and critical attitude stresses the general unknowability of things and a need to discover the absolute Way before any real knowledge is possible. The word Way of Tao is very characteristic of the Chinese '玄学', an equivalent of the Western 'philosophy'. Zhuang Zhi and Lao Zhi wrote voluminously on the central concept of the Way but the two thinkers never stated explicitly what they meant by Tao or Way. All they did was try to instill a vague and general impression in the reader concerning the Way and to give only a clue for the intuition of the reader to follow. For instance, Zhuang Zhi wrote to the effect that everything was derived from and was included in Tao or Way. (道, "生天生地", "覆载天地, 刻周旋众影") He also stated that Tao was invisible and unpalpable but it was real just the same, that Tao transcended time and it was absolute, and that Tao was the origin of everything in the world. ("夫道, 有情, 有形, 无为。形, 可传而不可受, 可得而不可见, 自本自根, 未有天地, 自古以固存; 神鬼神帝, 生天生地; 在太极之先而不为高, 在六极之下而不为深, 先天地生而不为久, 长于上古而不为老。")

14. Du Qingyuan, Collection of Miscellaneous Dramatic Essays (Beijing: Chinese Drama Publishing House, 1986), p.9.

15. See Note 3 in Chapter Five.

16. Lao She, Lao She on Drama (Beijing: Chinese Drama Publishing House, 1981), p.50.

17. & 18. The Beijing People's Art Theatre was officially set up in June 1952. At first the theatre was not specialised in the performance of the spoken play. It was a kind of conglomerate theatrical group which produced traditional local operas, such

folk art forms as cross-talks, and the modern spoken play. It was in the mid and late 50s that the theatre became specialised in the performance of the spoken play.

19. Zhou Ruixiang, comp., The Unforgettable Twenty-five Days: Teahouse in Japan (Beijing: Beijing Publishing House, 1985), p.148.

20. Beijing People's Art Theatre, Theatrical Art of Teahouse (Beijing: Chinese Drama Publishing House, 1980), pp.281-282.

21. Lao She, Selected Works of Lao She (Chendu: Sichuan Culture and Art Publishing House, 1986), pp.5-6.

V. A Cinematic Representation of Teahouse

After more than four hundred successful performances both in China and overseas, Teahouse was eventually adapted into a movie in 1982 by the Beijing Film Studio. The film had the same cast as that of the dramatic version of the play. In fact, the performers of the play remained more or less the same for over twenty-four years. Despite the more or less permanent cast of the theatrical version of the play, great changes were made in the filming of the play on the basis of the 1979 version of the theatrical performance.

Xie Jin 谢晋 was the director of the movie. Though he tried hard to preserve the original features of the play in its theatrical version, changes were made so that the play lent itself to the generic specialties of the movie. The cinematic adaptation was obviously a success for the movie won a major film award in 1984. Basically, the spoken play of Teahouse was outstanding in four aspects. First, it had a collection of well-carved characters like Wang Lifa, Fourth Elder Chang, Qin Zhongyi, and Kang Shunzi. One would not confuse them one with another. Second, the language of the play was original and it had a strong local colour. Third, the play had been directed by well qualified people like Jiao Juying and Xia Chun. Finally, the play was performed by some excellent actors and actresses like Yu Shizi 于是之 cast in Wang Lifa, Zhen Rong 郑榕 cast in Fourth Elder Chang, Lan Tianye 蓝天野 cast in Qin Zhongyi, Hu Zhongweng 胡宗温

cast in Kang Shunzi, Yin Ruochen 英若诚 cast in Pockface Liu, Huang Zhongruo 黄宗洛 cast in Second Elder Song and Tong Chao 童超 cast in Eunuch Pang. It was a good idea to record the play and its good performance by way of a film.

Director Xie was obviously aware of these four strong points of the theatrical version of the play and he made a point of preserving these advantages as much as he could while translating them into the cinematic language. However, the filming of the play was not as simple as videorecording a theatrical performance of a play. The film and the stage employ practically two different kinds of artistic language. Before an actual study of the cinematic adaptation of the play, it may be necessary to briefly discuss the process of the cinematic adaptation of a play from its theatrical performance.

First of all, the movie is basically a realistic medium. It records and probably interprets. It attempts or at least pretends to give the audience an impression of a natural environment with natural people in it. People speak, walk, feel, love and die much as people in everyday life do. Though what lies beneath the facade of realism may turn out to be something quite unrealistic as the scientific or futuristic movies do, the movie follows a logical and realistic pattern. If it deludes and cheats, it at least deludes and cheats realistically.

In contrast, though the play may succeed in being realistic to some extent, the play is divided into several acts which may not be as smoothly connected as the film. Besides, the use of the curtain and the false stage setup further reduces the sense of reality of the theatrical performance. In short, the nature of

make-believe of the theatrical performance was easily visible and the theatre audience had taken this make-believe nature of the theatre for granted.

Second, the movie has at its disposal all the necessary conveniences to produce a realistic impression. Time and space pose no serious problems for the movie as they do the theatre. Film editing makes time seem more flexible; flashbacks, even flash-forwards, multiple repetitions of the same moment, ellipses achieved often through montage, are all commonplace in the film. In addition, a film camera may record action taking place in an actual teahouse and its exterior while the theatre can only come up with a make-believe teahouse which may be further limited by the particular stage on which the play is performed. Thus, film space may be 'real' in a way denied to the theatre space.

Third, the angling or positioning of the film camera somehow determines for the audience its point of view toward the film. What the audience sees is forever and unconditionally what the film camera sees. In another sense, what the audience sees is what the film-maker wishes the audience to see. In contrast, the theatre shows a great objectivity; the audience may watch a show from the side or from the back of the theatre. Almost always the theatre audience can have an overview of whatever is occurring on the stage and an overview of the performance of all and every character on the stage.

Fourth, to use McLuhan's term, it is customary to consider theatre as a cooler medium than cinema. This is because the performers are as aware of the audience's presence as the

audience is aware of the presence of the performers. In other words, such conventions as theatre space being representative induce the audience to not only watch the show but also contemplate on what the show tries to represent. In contrast, the movie audience has a great sense of identification with what the film narrates or describes.

Fifth, insofar as acting is concerned, the movie achieves a greater sense of reality than the theatre. A performer on the stage has to speak much more loudly than is realistically necessary. His walking and other movements on the stage also have a sense of make-believe as is determined by the make-believe nature of theatre space. Besides, the performer has to confront a theatre-full of audience whom he has to accommodate while he tries to make believe that he is speaking and moving in somebody else, the dramatic character's shoes. In comparison, the film actor or actress does not have to face an audience when the film is being made; s/he faces a film camera. S/he speaks and moves in a realistic fashion. Moreover, film space makes it easier for s/he to behave realistically in somebody else's shoes.

The above is a list of some of the apparent differences between the stage and the film. Insofar as the cinematic adaptation of a play is concerned, according to Jack J. Jorgens, there are three modes of adaptation, namely the theatrical mode, the realistic mode and the filmic mode.<1> By the first mode is meant the kind of filmic rendition of a play more or less in accordance with the theatrical performance of the play. The costume, dramatic features, style of performance and the stage setup of one particular stage performance are faithfully adhered

to. This mode of filmic adaptation is often seen in the filming of most of the traditional Chinese operas. Because the traditional opera is something distinctly different from the modern spoken play and because the former is a theatrical mode more to the aesthetic taste of the Chinese audience, local operas are mostly rendered into movies in more or less their original theatrical form. Another reason which is equally important is that the traditional Chinese drama is heavily performer-oriented. Often fans of one particular performer or school of performance would go to the same show again and again not that they have difficulty understanding the content of the opera nor that they feel like subjecting the show to a strict critical scrutiny, but that they take to one performer's characteristic singing, speaking, dancing and acrobatic fighting.

The realistic mode of filmic rendition refers to that act of artistic translation which moves the theatrical performance out to a natural and realistic setting. Because of the natural and realistic setting, the theatrical performers now become film actors and actresses whose spatial and temporal relationship to the play and its content is fundamentally changed. They do not face an actual theatre audience. They can take time to dress as differently as the occasions require, appear in different localities and not perennially on the few square metres of the stage, and do and re-do a scene again and again till perfection is achieved without having to mind the audience because it will not be there. Compared with the theatrical mode, this mode brings the film version of a play farther away from the theatre and

closer to the reality. In other words, an awareness of the difference between the theatre and the movie makes the filming of a play not just an act of recording but also an interpreting and adapting process with the result that a play becomes more a film than a play, at least to an unperceptive audience who may not have seen or have heard about the play.

The third mode is the filmic mode by which is meant that a film adaptation of a play bears only a tenuous resemblance, often none at all, to the theatrical genre. A greater freedom which somehow amounts to a total neglect of the original dramatic and/or theatrical version of a play distances the film done in its filmic mode from its theatrical origin and the mechanisms of the theatre are completely replaced by the mechanisms of the movie.

In what way was the filmic version of Teahouse different from its parental theatrical version? The film version of Teahouse was a combination of the theatrical and realistic modes mentioned above. For one thing, all the actors in the film version were the same performers in the theatrical performance of the play, which carried a high degree of theatricality into the movie. On the other hand, the realistic setting, the use of external shots as well as the inclusion of background-indicating massive scenes of history enabled the play to transit more smoothly from one act or historical period to another. At the same time the film-related techniques made the play shed some of its theatrical artificiality. In addition, such film techniques as voiceover, montage, and music were extensively used to create, sustain and intensify a sense of reality. Last but not least,

some changes were made in the language and plot of the original play so that a more realistic impression might be created.

This chapter will only concern itself with a cinematic study of Teahouse. As the film was to a large extent based on the theatrical performance of the play, comparisons between the film and theatrical versions of the same play are hardly avoidable. At times, for clarity's sake, the comparisons will also bring in the original drama text. However, these comparisons are sketchy and more factual than those to be included in the next chapter where the three artistic forms of Teahouse will be examined in a more theoretically comparative context.

To begin with, the film version of Teahouse was shot in a realistic setting. Not only the interior and the exterior of the teahouse but also the way people dressed, talked and felt had an unmistakable sense of historical reality. Contributing in a major way to this overall impression was the extensive use of the sound effect accompanied by a visual picture of the creator(s) of those realistic sounds; the inclusion of crowds of people not found in the original script of the play, nor technically permitted by the stage; the localisation of parts of a larger scene as opposed to a theatrical overview of the entire stage and cast; the use of close-ups which were noted for their capability to show the characters' inner thoughts and feelings as opposed to the exaggerated bodily movements of the theatrical performance for the sake of a better view of the entire audience in the theatre; and, the natural light effect which indicated the passage of time. In addition, because of the greater spatial and temporal

freedom of the film, the film camera which replaced the theatre audience's naked eyes shuttled between the interior and the exterior of the teahouse, minding in the least the physical difficulty or impossibility of a theatre-goer's trying to be both inside and outside a teahouse and to be both within and without a character's head and heart. In a way the movie's ability to create a highly realistic sense imparts to the film audience an omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence, the like of which can only be shared by a novel reader.

To be concrete, the film Teahouse began with the closeup of the sign post of a teahouse which lasted for several seconds. The next moments showed a highly visible historical background of the first act of the play. Synchronising with the visual historical background was the voiceover which put into word and focus the visual historical background of the act. After the voiceover came Oddball Yang with his clapper ballad. The theatrical version of the play, though, began with Oddball Yang. After the historical background and the exterior of the teahouse were taken care of, the camera took the audience into the teahouse and began to give a visual and audio account of the teahouse. It was here that Lao She's original drama text began.

From a comparison of the different beginnings of the film, the theatrical production and the original drama text we might notice that the film, more than the theatre, commanded a unique language of presentation. It was a highly visual language which attempted to be emphatic (closeups) as well as comprehensive (greater spatial and temporal freedom). In comparison, the theatrical language excelled in arousing the audience's sense of

involvement; the audience met the characters in person through the performers. To watch a live show was like seeing and hearing a real person whereas to see a film was like dreaming that one was caught up in the life of a total stranger though the life of that stranger was anything but boring.

To read a drama text, one not only got to know a character, one also gave a free play to one's imagination which conjured up a number of varied visual pictures. Besides, reading was not a completely repeatable process. Reading was 'situated' in a particular time and space. It also came under the influence of the reader's constantly changing attitude toward life and literature and whatnot. Though every artistic act was differently 'situated', reading a book was a more subjective act than seeing a film for in the latter case it was the directors, performers and other co-producers who called the shot. In comparison, the movie audience was forced into a passive and predominantly receptive capacity. This was because there was so much in the favour of movie-makers that they had the time and material and human resources to come up with a more realistic and faithful replica of life and there were not many loose ends left for the imagination of the movie audience to fill in or straighten up.

Sandwiched between the movie and the drama text was the theatrical performance. On the one hand, it put to partial rest the imaginative faculty of the theatre audience as the characters in the original drama text were fleshed out by dint of the performers' life-instilling physical representation of the

dramatic personae. In other words, the theatre audience, unlike the reader of the drama text, had fewer reasons and/or occasions to call into service its imagination to fill in the holes in the verbal picture created by the drama text. On the other hand, the theatrical performance could not afford to be as realistic as the film; the theatre space and time were limited and the presence of an attentive audience throughout the more or less spontaneous show made it hard for the theatre performers to overcome the limited theatre space and time. Besides, if reading a book was as much a subjective act as writing a book, so performing a play was as subjective as writing a play. In other words, the performer could not repeat to the minutest detail and to precision his performance on the previous night. On the part of the performer, s/he had to improvise according to his particular understanding of the play and according to his particular mood on that particular night of performance. However, though the performers might be the same from one night to another, the audience was different most of the time. On the part of the theatre audience, it was as aware of the limitation of the theatre space and time as the performers and it knew that the theatrical performance was not real life itself. So the audience also used its imagination to bridge the show with his personal life. The audience contemplated on its personal life and experiences in as objective a manner as that in which it watched the show; the tears it might shed, the fear and other emotions it might have existed partly for the characters in the show and partly for the audience itself. The theatre had a cathartic function insofar as the theatre audience was concerned. Though the same cathartic effect

was felt by a reader of the drama text, the intensity of this catharsis was relatively small in the reading act than in the act of watching a live show.

In short, the more realistic and the closer to real life an artistic form is, the less imaginative the audience need be. However, in the age of the popular culture and art, the less subjective or imaginative an artistic medium expects the audience to be, the more popular that artistic medium can be. The popularity of Teahouse was enhanced mostly by the film version of the play. There are of course other reasons such as the repeatability of the movie show, especially so in the age of the video-cassette. As Chapter Six will take up this issue once again and in a more theoretical light, it is wise to leave the assertion here as it is for the time being.

The film techniques used in the filmic rendition of Teahouse also included the voiceover which changed the structure of the theatrical version as much as the character of Oddball Yang and his clapper-ballads changed the structure of the original drama text of the play. In the film the voiceover preceded the appearance of Oddball Yang. But the importance of Oddball Yang and his ballads in giving the three acts of the play their respective historical setting and an introduction of what the respective acts were about to recount were in no way diminished. Rather they were enhanced by the use of the voiceover. The voiceover did a more direct and efficient job of specifying the different historical background for each act. In contrast, the clapper-ballads were more informative insofar as the one

particular teahouse and its owners and customers were concerned. Besides, because of the use of the voiceover, the film audience could pay more attention to and show greater appreciation of the folk art form of shu lai bao, one of the several folk art forms which flourished in the teahouse. Lao She used to frequent teahouses in his teens not so much to drink tea as to be exposed to the kind of art forms such as the Peking opera. The influence of the Peking opera or the traditional Chinese drama on the writing of Teahouse has been examined in both Chapter Three and Chapter Four. Lao She even wrote a play -Fang Zhengzhu 方珍珠 - about folk artists. References to folk artists were plenty in Teahouse.<2>

If Oddball Yang was regarded as a character in the theatrical performance of the play, he was merely a minor character whose major function it was to help shorten and smoothen the transition between acts. In the film which had at its disposal other and more effective means of executing transitions between acts, Oddball Yang, apart from giving additional background information of the play, symbolised the kind of fate of folk artists in the old society and the kind of folk art forms that were active in teahouses of the past. In other words, Oddball Yang was treated not as a marginal but as a full character in the film version of the play. He aged, despaired and probably died in the same way as the tragic character of Wang Lifa and such other characters as Fourth Elder Chang and Qin Zhongyi.

One more comment on the retention of Oddball Yang and his ballads in the film version of the play. As has been pointed out

early, the film had at its disposal other and more effective means of transition than what the character of Oddball Yang could come up with. The retention of Oddball Yang and clapper-ballards, apart from the service they did to the play in matters such as providing a background to the show, was an instance of how hard the director of the film tried to preserve the peculiar features of the original theatrical performance of the play. Characters identical to the narrator-character of the novel and identical to the prelude and interlude in the traditional Chinese drama were a unique and innovative contribution Lao She made to the modern spoken play. It was a stylistic and structural feature that was worth preserving. The retention of Oddball Yang is a fine instance of the theatrical mode of filmic adaptation of the theatrical performance.

Closeups were used with a high frequency in the film version of Teahouse. As was mentioned early, closeups were good at reflecting the inner feelings and emotions of the film characters. This characteristic film technique was used to good effect in Teahouse. If the facial makeup in the theatrical production of the play was not as crucial as the general stage setup, then in the film version the facial makeup was most crucial. With the short range of the film camera, the facial expressions became an indispensable means of showing the inner feelings and emotions of the characters which might be otherwise represented through exaggerated bodily movements and a plentitude of oral utterances.

Unlike the theatrical version of the play, the film version

had a musical accompaniment. Fourth Elder Chang's appearance in Act Two was preceded by a piece of nostalgic music. The character of Fourth Elder Chang was of course played up in almost every staging of the play and in the film version. The reason was that Chang was a representative of the proletariat who had enough guts to stand up for himself and for others. Though the Qing Dynasty was indeed 'finished' as the chess-players at the close of the previous act had accidentally prophesized, though he was jailed for expressing his fear that the Qing Dynasty might fall, Chang was a Manchurian bannerman and he could not help feeling nostalgic about the by-gone days when he had both the leisure and the money to frequent teahouses. Though Wang's teahouse had changed a lot during a space of ten' years while Chang was in jail, to Chang it was a symbol of the careless days of the past, his youth, freedom and a material well-being.

The precedence of the music before the appearance of Chang, on the other hand, was a technique much used in the traditional Chinese opera represented by the Peking opera. The technique was used for the sake of emphasizing the importance of the character that was about to appear on the stage and in order to give the audience a moment of suspense and imagination with regard to the kind of character who was to appear and the way the performer was going to execute his first appearance on the stage. In the jargon of the Peking opera, it was part of the technique used to create a 'bright appearance'.^{<3>} Usually only leading characters were privileged to make a 'bright appearance'.

Another reason why this technique was frequently used in the traditional Chinese drama was that the traditional Chinese drama

was mostly a performer-oriented drama; all the external equipment and techniques were employed to give the performer a favorable relationship with the audience. In the case of Chang's appearance in Act Two amidst a nostalgic flute music, the audience could not but identify itself most sympathetically with Chang. The music, coupled with the shabby clothes Chang was seen wearing as compared to the full bannerman wear in the previous act, Chang commanded the audience's attention and curiosity the minute he stepped into the picture. The change from a young and properly dressed Manchurian in the Qing Dynasty to a middle-aged hawker of vegetables dressed in homespun clothes and a straw hat was anything but undramatic. In short, the music was used most selectively and wisely in the film version of the play. It accomplished the dual task of giving a relief to people's wrought-up tension at the close of the first act and of giving a dramatic touch to the appearance of an important character for which both the original playwright and the film-maker showed a great deal of sympathy. It was an innovative use of the film technique in the adaptation of a play from its theatrical performance.

The technique with which the music was used in the film, on the other hand, showed some resemblance to the use of the percussion instruments and the singing from the back stage by the character that was about to make his first major appearance in the traditional Chinese drama. The traditional Chinese drama set great store by creating a 'bright appearance' for the leading positive characters. Thanks to the use of the music, the drastic

changes that befell Fourth Elder Chang were highlighted and properly dramatised. It meanwhile gave a relief to the taut tension which gripped the audience towards the end of the previous act and thus prepared them for the second act.

In short, the film version of the play successfully retained many of the unique features of the theatrical production of the play while it applied the film techniques to good effect. The music, voiceover, realistic or natural settings, a greater filmic space, close-up shots and other film techniques combined to transform a theatrical performance into a successful movie. The film version of Teahouse was an example of the realistic and theatrical modes of film adaptation combined.

Note:

1. Jack J. Jorgens, Shakespeare on Film (Indiana University Press, 1977), p.4.

2. There are two characters in the play who made a living by telling stories in public places like Wang Lifa's teahouse. In Act Three the conversation between the two folk story tellers showed how miserable life was for folk artists and how folk artists feared that their folk artistic traditions might 'rot away - roots and all'. Besides, Wang Lifa made several references to the folk art in his dialogues with Qin Zhongyi and Fourth Elder Chang.

3. The traditional Chinese opera set great store by giving a powerful treatment to the very first appearance a character-performer made on the stage. It was because the classical Chinese opera had a strong performer-oriented tradition. The subject matter of the traditional Chinese drama was mostly history. The Chinese theatre-goers had a substantial prior knowledge of the history and the historical figures before they went to the play. What they expected, then, was an idiosyncratic performance by the singer-dancer-speaker-and-acrobatic-fighters. A most dramatic first appearance on the stage by a performer somehow established a common cord between the performers on the stage and the audience off the stage. This was because both the performers and the audience knew that what made the classical Chinese drama what it was was not just its predominantly historical subject matter but also a heavy emphasis on the way history was to be artistically recreated on the stage. The greater the attention the audience paid to the performing art, the more the performers paid their attention to their 'first appearance' on the stage, an appearance which was highlighted by the material and technical aids the theatre possessed such as the light (bright) and percussion instruments. On the other hand, a 'bright first appearance' demanded the performers to try to bring out the spiritual essence of the historical characters they were playing. Meanwhile, the audience applied its aesthetic and critical judgements in a bid to reach a more thorough understanding of the history and an aesthetic gratification.

VI. A Comparative Study of Teahouse

In the previous chapters Lao She's Teahouse has been studied textually, theatrically and cinematically. In this chapter emphasis will be placed on the medium difference and the relationship between the medium and the audience. In other words, the drama, theatre and movie will be studied in light of the mass communication theory as well as the semiotic theory.<1> The point I wish to prove is that the more physical and substantiated a picture is, the less imaginative the audience becomes. Adversely, the less imaginative the audience is expected to be by an artistic medium, the more popular that medium becomes with the mass audience.

Undoubtedly, the drama, theatre and film all involve a source of information, a medium and a target of information. The literary theories have so far shown an excessive interest in the originator of the information and the content of the information, though they are also trying to catch up on the target of the information. However, few critical efforts have so far been made to deal with the whole process of artistic communication. Though some mass communication departments in the Western universities have included the drama, theatre and film in their curricula, the three artistic media take up low positions in the hierarchy of the mass communication studies. Not infrequently models of such communication processes as journalism and advertisement are applied to the study of the drama, theatre and film. It is certainly productive to look at artistic communication processes

in light of the theories generally applied to the more general mass communication processes. However, the methodology of the mass communication studies and theories thereof have been specifically developed for the study of the general instead of the artistic communication processes. Consequently, some features in the artistic communication processes are overlooked. For one thing, the contemporary mass communication theories have paid little attention to the role of imagination in such communication processes as the drama, theatre and film. Besides, some communication theories as well as models seem to be too general to be productively applied to the more subtle and aesthetics-oriented communication processes such as the drama, theatre and film. The reason may be that an artistic audience intentionally and willingly gets itself involved in an artistic communication process not for the sake of getting sheer information about things that happen around them; instead, it expects to have as well an aesthetic experience which is seldom provided by the information-oriented newscast or telecast.

A comparative study of the three artistic media into which Teahouse was rendered, therefore, could use some assistance from the literary semiotic theory which is a more literary approach to the study of the drama, theatre and film. This theory dissects a work of art into some smaller units or sets of signs which are capable of more than one layer of understanding and appreciation. It then proceeds to relate these signs to a process called 'signification'. In other words, a work of art is seen as a grouping together of signs that function as a sparkling stimulant which sets in motion the audience's imagination and association.

Because reading a drama text, watching a theatrical show or seeing a film is some kind of an aesthetic move not intended for a gathering of information, these artistic communication activities involve a greater degree of subjectivity on the part of both the artistic creators and the art consumers.

Methodologically, this chapter will make use of the findings and theories of both the mass communication theory and the literary semiotic theory. The two theories will be put into a mutually supplementary relationship. What subtlety and literary applicability are lacking in the first theory will be supplemented by the more specific and art-oriented semiotic theory. By the same token, what compatibility with other communication processes that is lacking in the semiotic theory, i.e., a lack of a larger and broader view of the artistic communication processes in the semiotic theory will be reinforced with the mass communication theory. Before a comparison of the three artistic forms of Teahouse it may be necessary to sum up briefly some of the more important principles of both theories.

First the mass communication theory. The question of 'What is communication?' has led to a plethora of articles with titles like "On Defining Communication: Another Stab" (Miller, 1966) and "On Defining Communications: Still Another View" (Gerbner, 1966). This is because different people try to define communication via different approaches. While some definitions stress sharing^{<2>} and intentional influence,^{<3>} others include any kind of influence or response (with or without intent).^{<4>} However, the term 'mass communication' can, in a sense, be defined more easily

than the term 'communication'. Or at least we can point out the characteristics that distinguish mass communication from interpersonal communication. Mass communication undoubtedly implies that there is a large audience involved. Besides, the source is an institution or organisation. Finally, some kind of mechanism is used to reproduce messages.

The scientific method used in the communication studies is basically dependent on observation and the testing of assumptions against the evidence of the 'real' world. In more concrete terms, the mass communication studies apply such methods as survey, content analysis, experimental design, case study, statistics and validity and reliability research. For instance, the extensive application of communication models is a combination of almost all the methods mentioned above. It starts with observation of actual communication activities and ends in a generalised or theorised graphical summation of these activities. Of course in the process of this research methods such as mentioned above are used to test as well as to establish the validity of those models. However, no one model can explain the varied communication activities. Even if it could, it would defeat the purpose of a model - a simplified representation of the real world. So, care must be taken when applying one model to the study of one issue because an existing model usually has to be modified if not drastically changed so as to suit the task at hand.

Communication can also be studied from the point of view of the transmission of signal, i.e., the information theory. The communication process invariably begins with a source selecting a

message from all the messages which would be possible to communicate. This message can take the form of spoken words, musical notations, symbolic logic, body movements or a host of other forms. The transmitter codes the message in some signals capable of being transmitted over a channel to an audience which then decodes the message with some electronic or other technical aids. Three factors are particularly important in a communication process. They are the channel, the transmitter and the destination of a message. Because a communication process involves more than the two ends of the communication; also involved are a geographical distance between the two ends, the proficiency of the transmitter to code the message into transmissible signals, the good or not so good state of the channel such as a transistor radio or a television set, and the proficiency of the recipient to decode the signal into the original intended message. Because of these and other factors, there arises the issue of redundancy, noise and measure of a transmitter's freedom of choice in selecting a message to transmit or entropy in the terminology of physics. Redundancy is necessary to offset the noise in a communication channel. On the one hand, the more redundant a message is, the less information it is carrying. On the other hand, an increased redundancy will increase the efficiency of a communication system. In other words, a message stands a greater chance of being put across to the destination through a contrived and controlled redundancy due to the existence of noise in the mass communication process.

Noise, in contrast, is spurious information because it

increases uncertainty. Noise is defined as anything which is added to the signal which is not intended by the information source. Noise can take many forms such as distortions of sound in television, radio and film or distortions of shape in television and film. From the point of view of the destination, noise can also be competing stimuli from outside the channel. It might be a baby's crying or the low flying aircraft which blocks out the sound of a newscast. From the point of view of the mass communicator, he has to strike a balance between entropy, i.e., freedom in the choice of a message to transmit, and redundancy which is included in a communication process to overcome or offset noise.

This view of communication from the point of view of both the communicator and the communicated-to brings in the issue of the 'gatekeeper' theory. A 'gatekeeper' determines what information is passed along the chain and how faithfully it is reproduced. On the part of the mass communicator, they decide what news to broadcast and what not. From the point of view of the destination, the audience chooses and interprets a message according to its own individual needs. In information terms, communication takes place, according to communication theorist, Wilbur Schramm, 'when two corresponding systems, coupled together through one or more non-corresponding systems, assume identical states as a result of signal transfer along a chain'.

So much about the basic mass communication theory. Now a quick run-through of the more important concepts of the semiotic theory. Semiotics is a literary outgrowth of the information theory and the mass communication theory. It is 'a science

dedicated to the study of the production of meaning in society'.<5> It is equally concerned with processes of signification and with those of communication. In other words, it is addressed to the study of the means whereby meanings are both generated and exchanged. In fact, semiotics is not an isolated discipline; it is multi-disciplinary in nature. It originated in the linguistic studies by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and the American philosopher Charles Sanders Pierce.

Specifically, semiotics emphasizes the internal relationship of a sign and the external relationship between the signs in a semiotic framework. A sign is technically divided into a material vehicle or signifier and a mental concept or signified. The process by which the tenor and the vehicle are bridged is called signification. The process of signification is then subdivided into several sets or units of signifying signs. Every literary expression is governed by a denotation-connotation dialectic. In other words, there are primary and secondary meanings. A given vehicle may bear not just one but more than one meaning which may be inexhaustible to a patient and inquisitive mind. Every literary expression is an end product of the codification of messages. Besides, a codified message is given to transcodification by a different vehicle and it almost always ends up in a decodification on the receiving end of a communication process.

Semiotic signs can be natural as well as artificial ones. The difference between the two is determined by the presence or absence of 'motivation'. Natural signs are determined by the

natural cause-and-effect relationship whereas artificial signs operate on the basis of human intervention or volition. All literary expressions can be said to belong to the category of artificial signs as they are produced by way of icons, index and symbols. What principle that governs in iconic signs is a similitude between the sign and the signified. By index is meant the contiguous relationship between the sign and the object that the sign denotes such as the imaginary knock at a door which is supposed to indicate that there is someone outside. Symbol is an abstracted or intellectuated sign which connotes more than denotes an object by virtue of a law that governs the generally agreed-to signification process.

So much about the semiotic theory. Now just how do the mass communication theory and the semiotic theory apply to a comparative study of the three artistic forms of Teahouse? First of all, the application of the mass communication theory to the study of the drama, theatre and film is conducive to a study of the interrelationship among the communicator, the communicated and the channel of communication. In other words, the artist is not studied in isolation from the audience or the literary product that the artist creates. Similarly, a work of art is studied in relation to both the creator and the audience. And, the success of a piece of art is determined by how an artist is good at coding his message into transmissible and appealing signals on the one hand and how the audience is capable of decoding the signals back into the original message of the communicator in a way that the decoded message is intimately related to the personal life and point of view of the audience.

Moreover, the drama, theatre and film as processes of communication have a higher plane of attraction; they do not just inform, they also entertain.

It is the entertainment part of these artistic communication processes that is the substance for and focus of this comparative study because the communicator-channel-and-destination pattern of the drama, theatre and film is already all too apparent to establish. What needs to be further studied is the relationship between the objectivity of a work of art and the subjectivity on the part of the audience, i.e., the role the audience's imagination plays in the cognitive as well as aesthetic experience of the audience's readily and willingly exposing itself to a kind of communication that is not basically informative but entertaining.

Unlike the newscast on radio or television which reduces the audience to a state of passivity as all the audience does is to listen or watch a report of what has occurred or is occurring by an intermediary reporter or commentator, an artistic communication such as the drama, theatre or film enlists to a varying degree the audience's imagination and its sense of beauty. Moreover, for the theatre in particular the role played by a communication channel is almost eliminated; the audience sits face to face with the performers-as-characters on the stage with nothing in between except for a curtain which lifts and falls to signal a change of acts and/or scenes. For the drama though the presence of the writer is strongly felt by dint of the stage instructions which are a way the playwright intervenes to

tell the reader that the setting and the personality of the characters are such and such, the economy of words used by the playwright in giving such instructions is such that there is plenty of interpretable blank left for the reader's imagination to fill in. The film, comparatively speaking, presents a most realistic picture of life, which means that imagination may not be as important to seeing a film as it is to reading a drama text or watching a play. In a sense, the film is closer to the more general communication processes such as the radio and television. However, the film is different from the radio and television in that it deals with fiction other than facts. This difference between fiction and facts equates to a difference between entertainment and information. Though both entertainment and information may exist in both the fictive film and the factual journalism, there is a marked difference in degree.

Now that the main differences between the artistic and general communication are pointed out, it is time to lay out and compare the different principles or mechanisms of the artistic and general communication. Basically, the former operates on the principle of imitation whereas the latter operates on the principle of description or giving an eye-witness account of things that have actually transpired. As something is always lost in imitation and as the imitator is in no way under the obligation to imitate something or somebody as it really and absolutely is, the exercise of imitation, a human instinctual faculty, is both fun and thought-provoking. Fun because of the existence of artistic rules identical to those of a game, say football. Just as the footballer has to conform himself to the

rules in order to stay in the game, so the artistic imitator has to stick to the law of probability so that however indirect or even distorted an imitation may be it will not lead the reader to disbelieve the imitation. In other words, the rules or limitations that bind the artistic imitation are that the imitator should be mindful of the physical probability on the one hand and he may somehow be entitled to a slight deviation from the beaten factual track in order to come up with a more seasoned account of the physical probability on the other.

Take the drama text of Teahouse for instance. The events and characters in the play were not actual historical events or figures. Lao She fashioned them on the principle of historical probability and on his personal life experiences. Insofar as the drama techniques were concerned, they were mostly in either the modern Western or the traditional Chinese dramatic tradition. However, Lao She never let the dramatic tradition bind his feet; he went off the beaten track by cleverly availing himself of the Western tradition at one time and the Chinese tradition at another time. Meanwhile, he was innovative enough to borrow some techniques from other artistic genres as the epic coverage of time, the novelistic characterisation and the alienating dramatic effect created by Oddball Yang so well attested to.

The playwright and the reader of the drama text are joined together by a bond of imagination. Imagination plays a far more important role in drama than in theatre or film. This is because drama text consists of only verbal signs. The images in a written play are drawn with visible linguistic signs called the written

language whereas theatre and film produce far more powerful visual pictures that are accompanied by rich sound effects. Linguistic researches show that human beings communicate fundamentally in pictures whether they are made of words, sounds, concrete objects or what not. Insofar as verbal images are concerned, signification occurs only through a concretisation of these images by way of imagination and free association. As to theatrical images, they are built on actual human emulations of some other human beings' lives in accordance with a playwright's script and the director's instructions, and that right in front of an attentive audience. Film naturally has a greater capability to be realistic and concrete as is proven in the previous chapter. Therefore, the role imagination plays in theatrical and filmic signification is not as great as that in dramatic signification.

The written drama text belongs to the category of the print medium. Visible verbal signs are the only means through which the playwright and the reader are related to each other. Most of the time the communication between the playwright and the reader is on a one-to-one basis. In other words, no intermediary person or nonperson is needed to help carry on the communication. Besides, the communication process is not much affected by either time or geography. A reader can read a play simply anywhere and at any time. He does not have to finish reading at one sitting. He can take all the time he needs and he can repeat the reading process for any number of time he wishes without incurring inconvenience or trouble to any agent.

Theatre, on the other hand, has to subject itself to many

limitations. For one thing, a theatrical performance is usually confined to within two and a half hours, which means that what happens to the characters over a long period of time has to be condensed to a few days or at most a few weeks of climactic events. Besides, the theatrical performance of a play is indebted not just to the playwright, it is also indebted in a major way to the director, performers, stage designers and other artists. After all what is concerned here is a medium transformation and the theatre people are most responsible for what a play looks like in the theatre. In other words, a literary, social, psychological and historical interpretation inevitably takes place in the process of the media translation. Besides, a totally different set of signs are used in the theatrical performance of the play.

Film deviates further from drama. The discussion of three main different ways of adapting a play into a film in Chapter Six has proven the case that film is entitled to a greater spatial and temporal freedom. Consequently, film comes closest to a realistic portrayal of life as it is or as the film-maker thinks it is. And, the participants in the filmic communication include not only the original playwright and an audience but also the film director, actors and actresses and many different kinds of technicians. Like theatre, film comes closer to what is known as mass communication. The film and theatre audience is larger than that of the drama. The source of the filmic and theatrical entertainment is an institution (a financial sponsor) or organisation (a studio or a theatre group). Some kind of

mechanism is also used to reproduce messages. In other words, the general mass communication model that involves the communicator, channel and destination may be applied to the study of such artistic communication processes as the film and theatre.

Undoubtedly, drama, theatre and film are sources of entertainment. Yet, in a way they are also made to serve moral, educational and ideological purposes. The existence of censorship is an unmistakable evidence. The fact that the reader of drama text is involved in an active communication process makes it less likely for him to be swayed by the playwright. However, theatre and film are so powerful means of persuasion that their audiences are forced into a state of relative passivity, which enhances their chances of being influenced by the moral and ideological pace-setters.

The issue of activity and passivity brings in the issue of imagination. Because of the lack of an intermediary translator and/or interpreter, the reader has to rely on himself to execute the signification. To do so the reader applies the method of imagining himself to be in the shoes of somebody he is reading about. He partly taps his personal life experiences and partly keeps a distance between the character in the drama text and himself. When the reader feels sad, the sadness is not just for the character in the play, it is also for himself which he keeps comparing with the character. The distance between the dramatic personae and the reader himself is further intensified by the undramatic setting in which the act of reading takes place. Besides, a thoughtful reader is not satisfied with reading a text only once; he often reads the text several times or not

necessarily at one sitting. That gives him both time and space to think and rethink. In short, the reading process is characteristically subjective or active.

Theatre and film, on the other hand, give rise to a lesser degree of subjectivity or activity on the part of the audience. This is because the intermediary artists like theatrical performers and film-makers have already simplified the communication for the audience. All the latter is expected to do is relax itself in a deep and comfortable chair and bare its mind of all worries and anxieties about life. Besides, most people go to the theatre and movie for the sake of relaxation and entertainment because unlike the reader of drama texts they are free from the task of from-abstract-to-concrete-image translation and interpretation. All that is done for them and that in a highly professional and pleasurable manner.

Consequently, the theatre and film audience thinks less but uses its senses of sight and hearing more. Instead of trying to create a mental picture of some character and an event from a group of written and abstract linguistic signs as the reader of drama text does, the film and theatre audience is presented with live people in the right costume, circumstances and locale such as the dramatic plot demands. Besides, there are picture-buttressing sound effects. Thus the audience is left with little motivation to think and imagine. Besides, the amount of message that is thrown at the audience within a brief period of time is so great that the audience finds little time to ponder on the intended message or to respond imaginatively and critically, at

least not during the time the play is being performed or the film is being shown. Everything happens so fast and in so brief a space of time that the audience is overwhelmed.

From the point of view of semiotics, everything is reducible to a set or sets of signs. Comparatively speaking, the drama text is a more highly complex set of signs whose signification is more open-ended than that of the theatre or the film. In other words, the theatre and film commands a more readily acceptable and comprehensible set or sets of signs. While reading, the reader confronts mainly abstract yet visible linguistic signs. As the human beings are gifted with more than the sense of sight, they are also perfectly capable of seeing with not necessarily their naked eyes but also the mind's eye, hear not only actual but also imaginary sounds, smell not only actual but also imaginary smell, taste not just actual but also imaginary taste, and touch not just actual but also imaginary objects. The composite picture produced by the written text is made up of some non-physical matter. Signification is achieved through imagination. Imagination itself is constituted by the reader's actual life experiences the memories of which are retained and stored in the human mind and are retrievable at the slightest stimulation. Because of the absence of physical objects, the reader instinctually resorts to his past memories via imagination and association. The act of reading is conditioned to a changing spatial and temporal environment. Besides, the act of reading is 'situated' in one's highly individuated personal experiences. Consequently, reading gives rise to an infinite number of signification. In addition, because of the absence of actual and

physical referents, the mind is free to conjure up innumerable mental replicas of the actual referents. The larger the number of varied readings, the greater the sense of gratification for the reader.

In contrast, the theatre and the film command a more direct and substantiated sense of realness. For the theatre the audience is powerfully plugged into a most dramatic and most real experience of somebody else whose life is being represented in its most sensual manner on the stage. For the film the audience is captivated by a greater sense of reality of the cinematic setting. After all the theatre and the film are strong in presenting a composite physical picture of real objects and real people. The audience does not have to rely heavily on his sensual memory for a signification. The audience sees, hears, smells, and even tastes and touches the 'signified' instead of the signifier. In other words, while denotation and connotation walk hand in hand in the reader's act of reading a written text, in theatrical and filmic representation, denotation has a sure upper hand over connotation. To put it in another way, while the reader of a written text tries to grapple with not just primary but also multiple secondary meanings, the theatre and film audience mostly holds on to the primary and immediate meanings.

In terms of semiotics, the reader is provided with only one set of signs, that of abstract written linguistic signs whereas the theatre and film audience is privileged with not just the set of oral linguistic signs, it is also provided with an acting set, a costumed set, a property set, a sound set and what not.

The more composite a picture is, the less necessary it is for the agent of imagination and mental association to substantiate that picture. Adversely, the less subjective an artistic communication, the less lastingly gratifying an aesthetic experience. However, because of the predominance of the mass popular culture which is supposed to be consumed just as material objects are, the less subjective or active and the more objective or passive an artistic communication is, the more likely it is for it to draw an audience.

The success of Teahouse was indebted more to the theatrical and filmic than to the dramatic version of the play. Lao She wrote the play in somewhere around 1956 and 1957. The play was staged in 1959, 1963 and 1979. Though the same theatre group and the more or less same performers produced the play on the stage, it was in 1979 that the play received its first big theatrical and commercial success. And it was not until 1982 that the play in its cinematic version brought the play its biggest critical acclaim. The changed political and social circumstances were one reason and the greater artistic tolerance on the part of the Party was another. However, the reason most responsible for the success lay in the greater repeatability of the movie show, a greater sense of cinematic reality and the fine cast of the theatrical performance of the play. Above all, the success was indebted to the excellent original drama text by Lao She.

Lao She is mainly remembered as a novelist and dramatist but not as a film-maker or theatre-director. Consequently, any study of Lao She would naturally base itself on his original works, that is, his novels and written plays. Similarly, Lao She fans

throughout the world use as their primary sources the original writings by Lao She. The cinematic and television adaptations of some of Lao She's masterpieces are merely attempts to interpret these works. Similar attempts are likely to be made in future. And, whoever tries to bring Lao She's works on to the stage and/or the screen will unavoidably have to do his homework on the original written texts of the writer and playwright.

This once again shows from the contrary that any serious understanding and appreciation of Lao She have to start with and be based on a textual study of the original written texts of Lao She's works. As a matter of fact, all theatrical, television and cinematic versions of Lao She's works do is no more than presenting to the audience the adaptor's interpretation of Lao She in another artistic form. In other words, whether it is the reader of the drama text or an audience of the cinematic as well as the theatrical versions of the same work of art, it inevitably has to undergo some stage of active or subjective understanding or interpretation via imagination. For the reader he does the work all by his own. For the theatre and film audience, somebody else does the work for it. Though the theatre and film audience is by degree a less subjective appreciator of the original writer, it in its own turn has to respond and react to the theatrical artists and the film-makers' understanding and interpretation of the writer if it has some prior knowledge of the original writer. Besides, if a theatrical and film version of a play strikes an audience as exceedingly well or poorly done, a thoughtful audience might think of going to the library to read

the original text of the play for the sake of either a more intensive appreciation of the play or a criticism of the theatrical and/or filmic renditions of the play.

Lao She's Teahouse was undoubtedly a successful play. However, the general knowledge and impression the audience has of the play come from both the theatrical performance of the play in 1979 and, more directly and more profoundly, from the film adaptation of the play in 1982. A skillful theatrical and filmic rendition of the play has in turn brought about an increasing interest in Lao She as a playwright and his many a play. Since the early 1980s there has been a revival of critical interest in and a critical re-evaluation of Lao She both as a novelist and as a playwright. Several books on Lao She and his literary works have been published as the bibliography of this thesis will show.

Apart from Teahouse, other literary works by Lao She, some of which are not necessarily plays, have been brought on to the stage, screen and television. The Rickshaw Boy 骆驼祥子 was filmed in 1982 and it won the 'Golden Cock' Film Award in the category of the best feature film in the same year. Of course The Rickshaw Boy which was originally a novel was once put on to the stage by the Beijing People's Art Theatre.

Lao She's trilogy Four Generations Undern One Roof 四世同堂 was adapted into a 27-episode television serial in 1985 in commemoration of the fortieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War. Though the trilogy was powerfully written, few people read it prior to the TV adaptation. After the TV serial was shown the circulation of the trilogy in print went up abruptly. Thus, it could be said that the TV adaptation of the

trilogy was instrumental in winning for the book the critical attention of the general public. However, the more literary-minded audience would like to go back to the original texts of the trilogy for a more personal and subjective appreciation and interpretation of the book.

So far the comparative study of Teahouse has been based on the original drama text written by Lao She, the theatrical representation of the play by the Beijing People's Art Theatre and the film representation of the play by the Beijing Film Studio. In other words, both the theatrical and film representation of the play was out of one theatre group and one film studio. Hypothetically speaking, if a theatre group other than the Beijing People's Art Theatre and a film studio other than the Beijing Film Studio had been responsible for rendering the play into its theatrical and film versions, because the artists had been different and they had a totally different set of ideosyncratic theatrical and film techniques as well as a different understanding and interpretation of both the dramatist and his play, then the end products of the theatrical and film versions of the play would have been quite different though both the actual and hypothetical theatrical and film producers and performers worked on the same play and maybe even the same script.

This brings in the issue of primary and secondary modelling. In other words, different artists with different understanding of one and the same original work of art and with different artistic background might come up with different artistic interpretations

of the work of art, especially when such an interpretation involved a change in the artistic medium. As the issue of primary and secondary modelling alone might make a topic for a substantial research paper and as this thesis is based mainly on the existing dramatic text and the existing theatrical and film representations of the play, suffice it here to say that any future theatrical and film representations of Teahouse will be quite different from the earlier theatrical and film versions of the play, otherwise all future theatrical and film representations of the play will be self-defeating in their aims.

In conclusion, imagination, association and subjectivity are existent in almost every form of communication, interpersonal or mass communication. This is because the human beings have an instinct to imitate and they have enough sense to believe that the closer they can come to the truth or the source for imitation, the better and more faithful and dependable the picture will be. In semiotic terms, the dialectic relationship between the signifier and the referent, between denotation and connotation and between primary and secondary meanings is responsible for the priority of either a subjective and active or a relatively superficial and passive signification. The dramatic text, being made up of merely written abstract linguistic signs, demands a greater play of the reader's imagination and his capability to associate what he reads about with what he personally experienced in the past. Because of a synthesis and interplay of more than one set of signs, the theatre and film are capable of producing a more material and substantial version of the dramatic world of a play. However, the theatrical and filmic

versions of a play are no more than possible understandings and interpretations of the play. A careful audience merely uses these versions as a reference for its own understanding and interpretation of the play and the playwright. It might think of going to the primary source of the original written text of the play and the playwright's biography for a proper understanding of the play and the playwright. However, all things considered, imagination plays a greater and a more important role in the act of reading a drama text than in watching and/or seeing a theatrical performance and/or film.

Notes:

1. 'Drama' is taken here to refer to the mode of fiction designed for stage representation and constructed according to particular ('dramatic') conventions. By 'theatre', on the other hand, is meant the complex of phenomena associated with the performer-audience transaction: that is, with the production and communication of meaning in the performance itself and with the systems underlying it. As to 'movie', it should be differentiated from 'film' though up to now these two terms have been used almost interchangeably. To call film movies is to view it as an entertainment rather than an art. In other words, movies attempt to provide enjoyment and relaxation whereas films attempt to convey enlightenment through aesthetic and critical challenge and involvement. Not infrequently we call some thought-provoking and artistically experimental movies 'art films'.

2. One way to consider the meaning of a word is to look at the etymology of the word, or the words in other languages from which it was derived. The word 'communication' comes from the Latin word 'communicare', which means 'to make common.' Wilbur Schramm, a communication theorist defined 'communication' as 'the sharing of an orientation toward a set of informational signs'.

3. Some communication scholars have defined all communication as being essentially persuasion. David Berlo, also a communication theorist, wrote: "All Communication behavior has as its purpose the eliciting of a specific response from a specific (or group of persons)".

4. Definitions in this category are the very broadest definitions of communication. Warren Weaver, for instance, wrote that communication referred to "all of the procedures by which one mind may affect another".

5. Keir Elam, The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama (London and New York: Methuen & Co., Ltd, 1980), p.1.

VII. Conclusion

Teahouse is one of Lao She's masterpieces. It is unique in that the play applied some stylistic features of other literary genres such as the novel, the epic poetry, the folk art, the traditional Chinese drama, let alone the Western spoken play. The success of the theatrical production of the play not only in China but also overseas, and, particularly, the cinematic adaptation of the play sufficiently showed the generic richness of the play and its wonderful appeal to audiences of all descriptions.

This thesis is dedicated to a comparative study of the three artistic forms of the play, i.e. the drama text, the theatrical performance and the filmic adaptation, in accordance with the mass communication theory as well as the semiotic theory. After a brief study of Lao She as a realistic playwright who was strongly influenced by a revolutionary literature, this thesis went to some lengths to study the three artistic forms of the drama, theatre and film. Then in the fifth chapter, all the three artistic forms of the play were critically related to each other in light of the mass communication theory as well as the semiotic theory.

As a drama text, Teahouse was outstanding in terms of the characterisation, the subject matter as well as the long coverage of time. The subject matter of the play was a historical review of the three major periods before the communist takeover in 1949. Unlike the traditional spoken play which covers no more than a few days or at most a few weeks of climactic developments, the

play by Lao She covered more than half a century of the modern Chinese history. Besides, instead of writing a historical play about the emperors 帝, kings 王, generals 将, and prime ministers 相, Lao She wrote about a group of people who might not have left any remarkable imprint on history but who, taken together, created a reliable impression of the historical periods in question. In doing so, Lao She successfully created at least three major characters who lived through all the three periods; a crop of father-son common characters who, in their negative capacities, showed the inevitability of social change; and more than two scores of supporting characters who combined to create an authenticity in the historical account of those periods prior to the 1949 communist takeover. As Lao She so well rationalised, a teahouse was a micro-society. In short, the historical subject matter inspired Lao She to resort to a novelistic characterisation in which he excelled and an epic coverage of both the time and the accompanying social, economic and political changes. This was a rare approach to the spoken play. In structural type, it belonged to the prose and epic category. One might also conjecture that Lao She was here directly or indirectly indebted to the traditional Chinese drama which was mainly historical in subject matter and was consequently used to a long coverage of time.

If the drama text of Teahouse showed a clear inclination to or a strong influence of the traditional Chinese drama, then in the theatrical version of the play this indebtedness to the classical Chinese drama was unmistakably greater. To begin with, Lao She at the suggestion of the directors and performers of the

Beijing People's Art Theatre daringly and effectively introduced the character of Oddball Yang who functioned not just as a fringe or marginal character as Lao She said but who also functioned much as a narrator-character did in some Western fictions. In other words, the character of Oddball Yang was technically used to execute a smooth connection between one act and another, he was also instrumental insofar as a prior general understanding of the following act was concerned. As soon as Oddball Yang finished chanting his clapper-ballad, the audience had had a pretty close picture of what the next act was about. Besides, Oddball Yang was treated in much the same way as such other characters like Wang Lifa, Fourth Elder Chang and Qin Zhongyi were treated. Lao She sympathised with them all but he could not help them avert the oncoming tragic fate; Oddball Yang aged, despaired and probably died in much the same way as Wang Lifa did at the end of the play.

Apart from the inclusion of Oddball Yang and his clapper-ballads which brought a structural change to the play, the theatrical production of the play was also successful in creating and enhancing the theatricality of the play. Not only did the wonderfully written stage language play a part in this theatrical translation of the play, the credit of the success of the theatrical production should also go in part to the clever stage design. So successful was the stage design that practically no change was ever made to it after its initial application in 1957. The seventy-odd characters of the play were divided and then seated around eight large tea tables. As the spoken play centred

on the dialogue, the characters were seated in a way that facilitated the dialogues among the characters and which at the same time showed the social, economic and ethnic relationship among the characters. Eunuch Pang and Qin Zhongyi sat at two neighboring tables; the verbal confrontation between the decadent feudalistic force and the rising capitalistic and patriotic force sounded both natural and unavoidable even in the geographical setting of a teahouse.

The fine cast of Teahouse which remained unchanged throughout the time since 1959 should also be credited with the success of the theatrical and the filmic adaptations of the play. Actors like Yu Shizi, Lan Tianye and Ying Ruocheng were so popular that they have now become either top Chinese theatrical performers and/or leading government literary officials. Ying Ruocheng, for instance, has been for several years deputy minister of the Ministry of Culture. Because of the inspiring performance of these people and the wonderful theatrical direction and stage design, the characters in Teahouse have been translated into memorable and live theatrical and filmic images of the three historical periods in question.

The filmic version of the play, in comparison, did most to bring to the play a favorable critical acclaim. The film won a film award in 1982. The successful film adaptation of Teahouse was a result of a combination of two out of three modes of filmic adaptation. The three modes are the theatrical, realistic and filmic modes. Teahouse showed a strong inclination toward the theatrical and the realistic modes. One of the motivations of filming Teahouse was an attempt to record the inspiring

performance of the play on the stage as well as the innovative dramatic form of the play. Consequently, the film went to great lengths to preserve the fine features of the theatrical performance. The same performers of the theatrical production became the cast for the film version of the play. Most of the shots were of the interior of the teahouse just as the theatrical performance was staged inside a teahouse. However, the film also made good use of the filmic space and time. Besides the interior shots, sometimes the film brought the audience to the geographically distant scenes of battles, not to mention the many external shots of the teahouse.

Of course some filmic approaches were also employed in the making of the film Teahouse. However, these approaches were not as significantly effective or applicable as those approaches associated with the theatrical and realistic modes. As a result, the film version of the play not only retained most of the fine qualities of the dramatic and theatrical versions of the play, it also gave the film version a greater sense of reality and a convincing historical cause-and-effect relationship.

In the sixth chapter, a comparison was made between the three artistic forms of the play. Without showing that one version was better than the other, that chapter mainly concentrated on the role imagination played in the appreciation and interpretation of the play. Naturally, the mass communication theory and the semiotic theory were applied. This was because the drama, theatre and film were important means of communication. However, they differed from other communication activities like

journalism and advertisement in that the audience did not only go after information, it also sought an aesthetic experience. Nonetheless, there was a difference in terms of subjectivity or activity and objectivity or passivity among the three artistic communication processes. Semiotically speaking, the drama text was made up of only abstract, written linguistic signs whose referents might be variable according to the different life experiences of the reader as well as his aesthetic sensitivity. In comparison, the theatrical signs included such other sets of signs as the acting set, the costumic set and the stage property set. In other words, the theatre was a better means of projecting life-like images of the play. However, the theatre was also one out of numerous ways of understanding and interpreting the play. Despite its explicitness, the theatre played down the importance of the audience's imagination. Imagination was most instrumental to an open-ended and consequently variable understanding and appreciation of the play. Imagination yielded a richer source of literary and artistic pleasure.

The film was further deviated from the original source of imitation. Though capable of setting the play in a more realistic cinematic locale, the film nonetheless reduced the importance of the audience's imagination or its subjective relationship with the play. The more substantial a picture was, the less important the role of imagination became in achieving a meaningful signification. However, in the age of popular culture, the film more than any other artistic forms appealed to the audience's sensual pleasure and memory. However, any artistic translation or adaptation of a play unavoidably had to start with the root

artistic form of the play, i.e., the dramatic text. This was because the closer the relationship was between the imitator and the target of imitation, the more reliable and faithful was the end product of imitation. Similarly, the closer an artistic translator or adapter could get to the original artistic form of a product, the more justifiable his adapted version might be. It follows that the filmic version of the play was successful for the reason that the film-makers had taken over the task of interpretation and understanding of the original play and the playwright. Consequently, the film audience did not have to be as subjective to the film as it would have to be to a written text. In other words, it could afford to be passive as somebody else such as the film-maker had been active on its behalf. However, a thoughtful audience might not take for granted the film-maker's appreciation of the play and its playwright; it would seek to go to the original source of the play - the written drama text. Lao She was remembered as a novelist and playwright and not as a film artist. Naturally, any serious study of Lao She as a playwright would eventually have to be based on the original texts of his plays. Meanwhile the theatrical and filmic adaptations of the play would only serve as a reference for a proper understanding of the play and the playwright.

Teahouse was one of Lao She's dramatic masterpieces. It was written in defiance of the officially approved dramatic approach to the socialist drama. The play showed Lao She's innovativeness both in the subject matter and in the dramatic techniques. It also showed that Lao She was becoming doubtful of the

revolutionary literature in 1956 and 1957. This doubt or tendency eventually brought him into a major confrontation with the propagandistic literary policy of the communist leadership and caused him to commit suicide at the height of the cultural revolution in 1966 just as Proprietor Wang did on the eve of the communist takeover of the country in 1949. The life story of Lao She as a Manchurian writer who once embraced and finally broke away from a communist literary point of view is a good case for the study of the nature, origin, evolution and ultimate destructiveness of the so-called revolutionary literature. The play Teahouse might serve as an important footnote to a study of the relationship between a realistic, patriotic, humanistic and innovative writer such as Lao She on the one hand and the kind of revolutionary literature that held an absolute sway in China on the other. Besides, the play offers a fine opportunity to study in a comparative perspective both the Chinese and the Western dramatic traditions and the literary medium differences. This thesis is but an initial attempt at a comparative study of Lao She, his Teahouse, and the Chinese and the Western literary traditions both of which exerted a strong influence on him.

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